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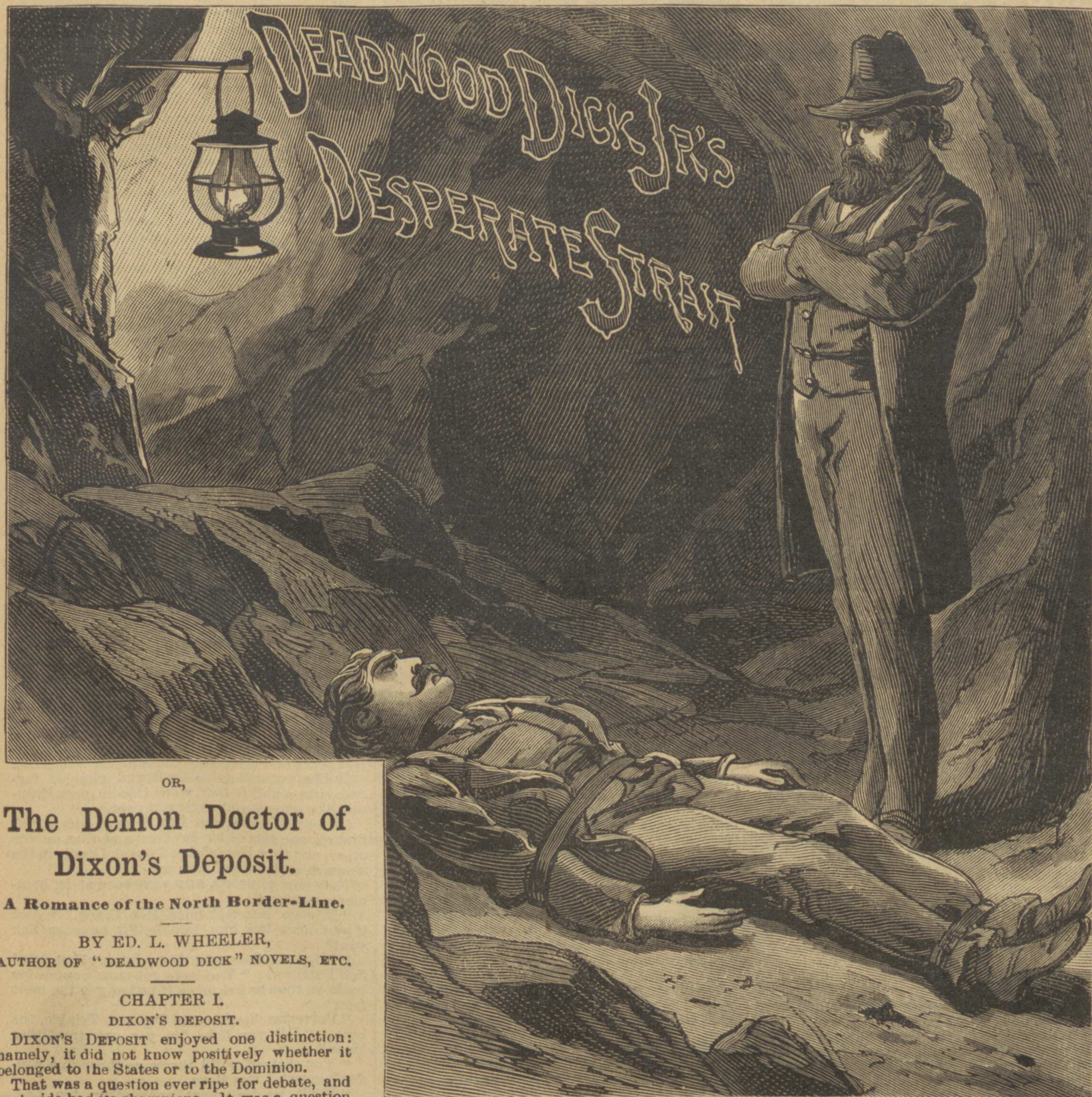
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OR,

The Demon Doctor of Dixon's Deposit.

A Romance of the North Border-Line.

BY ED. L. WHEELER,
AUTHOR OF "DEADWOOD DICK" NOVELS, ETC.

CHAPTER I. DIXON'S DEPOSIT.

DIXON'S DEPOSIT enjoyed one distinction: namely, it did not know positively whether it belonged to the States or to the Dominion.

That was a question ever ripe for debate, and each side had its champions. It was a question that seemed hard to settle. But then, it was not such a bad state of affairs after all. The camp

A GLANCE AROUND DISCOVERED TO DICK THE INSANE DOCTOR STANDING ONLY A LITTLE WAY OFF, LOOKING AT THE TRUSSED DETECTIVE.

could swear allegiance to either country, as best suited the time and occasion.

Let a United States marshal appear upon the scene and make himself known, and, if the importance of his mission required, the denizens of the camp were, almost to a man, the queen's subjects. And this, as a rule, worked both ways. Let a governor's agent come around, under like conditions, and lo! the camp was American to the backbone. A wild camp in every sense, harboring a good many rougs and toughs, it cared little for either country and was a law unto itself.

The hottest fighters over the question were Ezekiel Doodle and Howell Hobbs.

The first was an American familiarly called "Yankee Doodle," while the other was an Englishman nicknamed "Johnny Bull."

The two were forever wrangling over the matter, and not infrequently they came to blows. It was seldom that one or the other was not wearing the marks of a recent battle.

Doodle's shanty was in the northern part of the camp, and over it floated the Stars and Stripes in the form of a ten-cent print flag. Hobbs's domicile was in the southern part, and over his door waved the British ensign.

And no matter what came or didn't come, these two were, first, last and all the time, ready to stand up—to fight, bleed and die, if necessary—each for the country his flag represented.

Some of the others had fixed ideas regarding the matter, but were ever ready to drop over on that side of the fence which, for the time being, best suited the necessities of the case and their own interest.

Among these were Hen Dixon, Billy McFarland, Zephyr Zeke, and Ben Bone, who leaned toward the United States; and Sedgemund Kredge, Trystan Trinkle, Stanislaus Poor, and Job Patience, who were more inclined to believe that the camp lay to the north of the iron post line.

Let us introduce in order these personages.

Heary Dixon, the first mentioned, was a man past middle-age, a rough-and-ready fellow, the discoverer of gold in the gulch and now mayor of the camp that had been named for him.

Billy McFarland, the next, was proprietor of the only saloon—wonderful to say—the camp possessed. The saloon was called the International, and was the common resort of all, big enough to accommodate the entire population of the camp at once.

Zephyr Zeke was an old ranger and mountain guide, a man no less than sixty years of age, and one whose word ought to have been authority respecting the location of the camp with regard to national soil. He had tramped the ranges for years, and was well-acquainted with the country and all its landmarks.

Ben Bone, continuing in order, was one of the roughest of the rough characters of the camp. He had a nickname—"Knock-'em-stiff," owing to his great size, enormous strength and fighting preclivity. When occasion required, when Yankee Doodle and Johnny Bull got to fighting too hard, he was capable of taking both of them out of the saloon together without great exertion.

Sedgemund Kredge, of the second list, was proprietor of the only hotel, the Lion-and-eagle. He was a fat, ruddy-faced man, about forty years old, with a head as innocent of hair as a billiard ball.

Trystan Trinkle was a bumner without a redeeming trait. He lived only to drink, and it was only a question of time when drink would be his excuse for ceasing to live at all. He never had any money, and did chores for his keep at the hotel.

Stanislaus Poor was a cobbler, when he had anything to cobble and material to cobble with—which was not always the case. He could repair stogies, make and mend belts, patch up saddles, and do other odds and ends in that line as chance offered and as material at hand made possible.

And last, but not least, was Job Patience, a man of family. He had a wife of considerable avoirdupois, and seven growing daughters ranging in age from one to eight years—there being two pairs of twins in the bevy. These were the only females in the camp, excepting two, who will be mentioned presently. The future of the camp, it was jokingly declared, depended upon these daughters of Job.

The remainder of the camp's denizens stood noncommittal regarding the disputed question of allegiance ever ready to follow the direction of the local wind, no matter which way it blew.

There was one strictly neutral man in the camp, and this was Dr. Henry Witmore.

He had come to the place some time previous

to the opening of our story, and no one knew to which country he belonged, if to either.

The people of the camp had tried to find out, but had failed; and when pressed to say whether he held the camp to be in the States or the Dominion, the doctor had answered that he didn't care a snap which. Hence he was, as said neutral respecting that matter.

The doctor was an eccentric man, or was so regarded. That he was an able physician none could deny, for he had done some good work since locating at Deposit; but, while he was a good physician, and generally attentive to business, there was something about him others could not quite understand. He had what the denizens termed "spells."

For one thing, he was a great dog-fancier. He had an inclosure some distance in the rear of his shanty, in which he had about twenty dogs of various breeds, from the noble mastiff to the cur of low degree. The inclosure was large, and within it was a building almost as large as the doctor's own domicile.

Doctor Witmore was a man of education, and his appearance and manner spoke louder than words concerning his past. He had the air of a city physician of high standing and large practice, and that he had plenty of means at his command had been shown conclusively since his coming to Dixon's.

As stated, the only females at the camp were the wife and children of Job Patience; that is, all save two. These two were a daughter and a niece of Dr. Witmore—the one named Tella Witmore and the other Nola Jarvis.

These young ladies were about twenty years of age, of refined manners and excellent education. Their presence did not take away anything from the mystery that surrounded the doctor; in fact, it rather added to it. Why he, such a splendid man, with two such lovely young ladies, should come and settle at a place like that rude, out-of-the-way camp, was something no one could understand.

He did not seek practice, but had a sign on his shanty indicating that he was a doctor, and when any one called for his services he was ever ready to respond. Another sign under the first informed the public that the highest cash price would be paid for dogs of any and all kinds, big or little. He had brought but two canines with him, having purchased all the rest since his residence in the camp. His prices were liberal, so his kennel had increased rapidly.

His daughter and niece took care of his shanty, keeping house for him though on a small scale, it must be admitted.

They never went further from the shanty than to take a walk for exercise a little distance up the gulch early each afternoon, and then were careful not to go out of sight from the camp.

Dixon's Deposit was rather an isolated place. It was miles upon miles from any railroad point, and the nearest stage point was twenty miles distant. There was no post-office, and the camp had no connection with the outside world whatever except by means of messengers or through stragglers who came and went semi occasionally.

CHAPTER II.

LOST IN PERDITION PASS.

It was night, and Dixon's Deposit was under the cover of a darkness that was intense. Beyond the limit of the camp it was scarcely possible for a person to see his hand before his face.

Within the camp it was somewhat better, for the lamps in the International Saloon, the Lion-and-Eagle Hotel, and the various shanties, lent light enough for the one street.

It was that rugged, imposing, wooded mountain wilderness of the great Northwest, where the general appearance is somber enough even at noontide; and this was a moonless night, with dense clouds barring out the ever-faithful stars—a dreary, dismal, gloomy night.

Within the International Saloon, however, all was life, light and good cheer. Billy McFarland was behind the bar, his red shirt-sleeves rolled up to the elbows, and a broad smile upon his cherry-tinted face.

The saloon was well filled, since there were not more than a score of the inhabitants of the camp who were not present, and something of more than common interest seemed to be on the tapis.

And there was.

Ezekiel Doodle and Howell Hobbs were getting warmed up to one of the hottest arguments they had had in some time.

Billy McFarland was not the only one who was smiling, for there was a grin upon every

countenance in the room, and a loud roar of laughter had just subsided.

The two contestants were about in the center of the room, and were surrounded on all sides by the lookers-on. Doodle was tall and lean, while Hobbs was short and stout, each a pretty fair likeness of his nationality—the one "Uncle Sam" and the other "John Bull."

"Hit his the most blarsted country Hi hever set me foot hinto!" cried Hobbs, hotly excited.

"What country is ther wu'st one ye ever sot foot into?" demanded Doodle.

"Why, this one, to be sure."

"Ha! ha! Why, you blamed beef-eater, yer was only jest now sayin' that this was Canady."

"Hit his the country below the 'ills Hi mean, hof course!"

"Yer is a liar; yer meant jest what yer said, an' yer thort et war Canady. I 'gree with yer, that Canady ar' ther wu'st spot on airth, only fit fer a Cree red-skin ter live in."

"Hamerica, ye mean! Yes, to be sure hit his. Hi wouldn't be 'anged hin Hamerica!"

"That ar' jest what ar' likely ter happen to ye, afore ye leave this hyar camp of Dixon's Deposit, ye stuffed bulldozer!"

"Bless me heyes! Hif Hi thought this camp was hin Hamerica, Hi wouldn't stay 'ere han 'our."

"And if I thought it was in Canady, by hokus I'd move South in about two jerks of a jiffy, I swow. But, et ain't in Canady, as Zephyr Zeke hyar says, an' he is good enough 'thority fer me."

"I'm pritty sartain that we ar' on Uncle Sam's ground," that individual spoke up.

"Hand Hi ham just has sure that hit his hin Canady," insisted Johnny Bull, in his bulldog way. "Ha man 'as ha right to 'is hown bopin-ion habout it, Hi think. Hi wouldn't live in lany hother land than the land of me Queen—God save her!—Hit his hon 'er blessed possessions that the sun never sets."

"Waal, ther sun ar' sot hyar," retorted Yankee, "and if yer don't believe it, jest step out and see if it ain't. And if ther sun *don't* set on English soil, it's only because ye ar' sech a p'izen lot that ther Ruler of all things ain't goin' to trust ye in ther dark. America was a bully place, I opine, till we licked yer blamed Britishers right out of their boots."

"Hif hour glorious king 'ad cared much habout hit, you couldn't 'a' done hit, that Hi tell ye!" Johnny snapped. "Hand ye couldn't do hit to-day, no'ow."

"By hokus, we could wollop ye with one hand!"

"Hi say you couldn't!"

"I say we could!"

"Hif you think so much hof your blamed country, why don't ye get back hinto hit, hand not remain hon the Queen's soil?"

"Elast your British eyes! I've a notion to mash your British nose all over your blamed British face for ye; I have, by hokus!"

"You 'ad better try hit hon, that's hall; hand hif Hi wouldn't break ye hin two hin the middle, then Hi'm ha liar!"

"That's what yer be, anyhow!—a squat, tup-pence, Yarmouth bloater liar!"

"By 'eavens, Hi won't stand that!"

"Yer don't have ter stand et; lay down to it."

"Hi will lay *you* down, hin habout one minute, blarst ye!"

"Yer can't do it, Johnny Bull. I kin lick ye wuss'n my great granddad hundred years ago, whipped the red-coat robber."

"Hi'll show ye!" and at each other they sprung.

Doodle was about as long and lank as Hobbs was short and thick, and the contrast was great. Hobbs put down his head and plunged forward like a bull in fact, while Doodle spread himself like some gaunt eagle rampant.

On came Hobbs, and Doodle gave him a cuff first on one side of his fat head and then on the other, and then Hobbs's head struck Doodle in the stomach and doubled him up.

They now clinched, and were soon at it, hammer and tongs.

"Now go into it!" cried Hen Dixon. "And if you don't lick him, Doodle, I'll have ter lick you!"

"Wipe the floor with him, Johnny!" shouted Job Patience. "You have got more pounds ter back ye than he has, even if he has got the most feet."

"Pulverize 'im!" put in Trystan Trinkle, the bum. "Hif yer licks 'im yer can treat ther 'ouse."

"You shet up or I'll throw ye through a window," growled Ben Bone.

"Don't let 'em hurt each other too bad, Knock-em-stiff," directed Billy McFarland.

"Trust me ter 'tend ter that 'ar part of et,"

answered the great gladiator, who was watching the contest narrowly.

The combatants were now on the floor, kicking, striking, scratching, biting, making a terrible racket; and were going into it like the fabled Kilkenny cats, or worse.

The lookers-on had narrowed their circle around them now, and the combat was watched with interest, and not a few bets were hastily laid upon the result. John Bull had now a bleeding nose, from which both were pretty liberally bespattered; and Yankee Doodle had a fast-closing eye.

Encouraging shouts for each, commingled gibes jeers, were being uttered constantly, and the saloon was in a perfect uproar. The fighters were gasping, swearing, and occasionally yelling, as one or the other got a vicious bite; and finally the peacemaker considered it about time for him to interfere, and did so, much to the displeasure of the majority.

Stooping down, Knock-'em-stiff got a grip on the collar of each, and brought them to their feet with a jerk, holding them at arm's length and shaking them like a terrier might shake a rat.

"Ain't ye 'shamed of yerselves!" he cried. "Ye ar' wuss 'n some of Doctor Witmore's dorgs, by tarnation! I've a notion ter shake ye right out'n yer clothes!"

He didn't do that, however.

Each was about played out, and glad enough to stop fighting, and they hung limp and restless in the giant's grip.

When he had spoken as quoted, and had given a little extra shake to emphasize what he had said, he started for the door with them, and reaching it, threw them out headlong into the street.

"Thar ye go!" he cried. "Git up, now, and hunt yer holes, or I'm blazed ef I don't knock ther duff out'n ye both!"

The two gathered themselves up, muttering many a threat and imprecation, and set off in opposite directions, the wild laughter from the saloon ringing in their ears as they went.

"Et would sarve 'em right ter let 'em kill each other," Knock-'em-stiff observed, as he turned to enter the saloon again.

"An' they'll do et, too, afore they git done," declared one man.

"Hillo!" from another; "what's ther ailin' of ther doctor's dorgs? Hear how they're yelpin', wull ye."

"Reckon et's ther racket that's been goin' on hyar that's started 'em," surmised another.

"Hark!" cried Knock-'em-stiff, suddenly, at which the crowd was silent, and all listened.

At first there was nothing but the barking of the dogs, but, presently, another sound was heard.

"Help!"

Clear and distinct came the cry.

"I thort I heerd somethin' like that," said Knock-'em-stiff. And then he responded:

"Hilloo-oo!"

Fortunately the cry had come from a different direction from that of the yelping and howling canines, or it might not have been heard at all.

The crowd was silent enough now, eager to hear further from the voice out of the night.

"Help! This way!" Clear but faint came the returning words.

"Hold hard, an' we'll be thar," Knock-'em-stiff shouted back. And then to the crowd:

"Pards, some unwary pilgrim have got inter Perdition Pass, I take et, an' we must go an' git him out. Git lights, somebody."

Men sprung to obey at once, while the crowd in the saloon, guessing that something unusual was afoot, began to pour out.

"What is et?" asked one man, of Knock-'em-stiff.

That worthy explained again what he thought it meant, and the word was passed around that some one had lost his way and wandered into Perdition Pass.

Lights were speedily forthcoming, in the shape of lanterns and torches, and shortly the crowd set out from the saloon, headed by Knock-'em-stiff and Hen Dixon, together with the others who bore lights.

They turned down the street to the left on leaving the front of the saloon, in the opposite direction from where the yelping dogs were confined, and made their way toward the southern end of the pocket in which the camp reposed, and from which direction the cry for help had come.

"Et ain't a bit dark, aire et," commented Mr. Bone.

"Et ar' jest so black dark," returned the mayor, "that et has a depressin' influence on ther lights."

"I believe ye ar' right, mayor, fer sure."

A hasty walk of a couple of minutes brought them to the wall, which loomed up before them cold and gray.

The lights revealed an inky seam in it, as the party came near, which presently resolved into a yawning canyon when they stopped, and at their feet appeared a chasm as dark as Erebus.

"Hillo!" Ben Bone called.

"Hello to you!" came back the shout; and it was from the dismal depths far below.

"Who ar' ye?" questioned Knock-'em-stiff. "How kem ye down thar? Whar ar' ye headin' fer?"

"We are two travelers," came up the reply, in distinct and measured tone. "We were heading for Dixon's Deposit, but it seems here as if we have about reached the end of the trail. Is there any way out of this hole?"

"Yes; thar is a way out, but you ar' a good ways off ther track," Ben Bone made answer. "Yer has taken ther wrong trail at ther forks, 'bout a couple o' miles back. Thar's nothin' fer et but ter go back thar an' take ther other trail."

"It is so infernally dark," rejoined the unseen man, "that I did not know we had passed a forks. I see you have lights up there. Can't you let one down to us by some means or other, so that we can see our way? I've been in dark places before, but this beats them all."

"We'll see about et," responded Knock-'em-stiff. "You ar' about two hundred feet down, in somethin' of a hole fer a fact. Yer see, et will take a lengthy bit of string ter let a light down to ye. Hold on, though, an' we'll see what kin be done about et. Ye hasn't told us who ye ar', though."

"I told you we are two travelers," was the response.

"We knows that well enough, or ye wouldn't be thar, et ain't likely."

"Well, this is pretty long range for an introduction, so if you'll wait till we get to camp we'll do the polite. How far are we from that place, anyhow? Suppose you men belong there, eh?"

"Why, Dixon's Deposit ar' right up hyar on ther level," was explained. "Et ar' goin' ter cost ye five miles of travel ter git hyar, though. Ar' ye mounted?"

"Yes."

"Et won't take ye long ter go ther distance, then, if we kin git a light to ye."

Men had already been sent in quest of string, and the conversation was kept up until their return.

When they came back they had several balls of twine with them, which they had been fortunate enough to find at the hotel, and two lanterns were sent down to the lost travelers.

They reached the bottom safely and were removed from the string, and when the travelers had received directions concerning the route to the camp, their horses' hoof-strokes were heard, the light of the lanterns was seen as they moved away in the canyon, and the crowd returned to the saloon.

CHAPTER III.

ARRIVAL OF THE UNKNOWN.

WHEN the crowd had got back into the saloon, the natural subject for debate was the latest event. Said Mayor Hen Dixon:

"Mebby this hyar is another of them 'ar nosin' marshals. Ef et ar', we ar' prepared ter shout fer the Queen, I reckons."

"You bet!" responded Ben Bone. "Then ef thar is some articles found around hyar what ain't got Uncle Sam's brand on 'em, whose business ar' et? Ef he crows too loud we'll run him out."

"We'll have ter put ther choker onto Yankee Doodle while ther feller ar' in ther camp," suggested Billy McFarland. "I've got some likkers and smokes hyar that ar' innocent of stamps, ye know, and Doodle knows I'm on his side of the fence."

"Don't worry about Doodle," said Hen Dixon. "He knows that a still tongue shows a wise head sometimes, an' this hyar will be one of the times. Besides, what is one Yank in a hull British camp? Ha! Ha! Ha!"

"You boyees seems ter have settled ther matter that ther strangers ar' marshals, anyhow," observed Zephyr Zeke.

"Et hev been quite a spell of while sense we had a visit," reminded Dixon.

"What ef et happens ter be a Dominion agent?"

"In that case we'll have ter be Yanks, through and through, and put ther muzzle onto Johnny Bull instead of Doodle."

A round of laughter followed this.

When it was about time for the unseen Unknowns to make their appearance, the crowd began to grow impatient. Glances were cast in the direction from which they must come, from the saloon windows, and the light of the two lanterns was eagerly watched for.

At last it appeared.

"Ha! Hyar they come!" cried Knock-'em-stiff, as a light was discerned, coming now toward the saloon.

"We'll soon see their faces now," remarked Hen Dixon, "an' we kin guess purty close as ter what they ar' then."

"Open ther doors, boyees, an' give 'em a warm welcome, anyhow," suggested Zephyr Zeke. "They must be about played out, I should say, es they hev been long in their saddles."

Little need to mention opening the door, for that was done even while the old man spoke, and the crowd began to pour out, some bearing lights.

The two lanterns came nearer, and presently two horsemen drew rein in the circle of light before the open door of the International, where they and the crowd made a silent exchange of glances of mutual inspection.

That was but momentary, however, for the foremost of the strangers spoke almost immediately.

"Well, here we are, citizens, thanks to your kindly aid. That was a solemn hole we got into down there. You ought to close off that blind trail at the forks."

"We have talked about doin' that very thing, stranger, a good many times," responded the mayor; "but you see it is a deuce of a long ways ter drag ther stuff ter do et with. Ef trees growed on ther spot et would 'a' been done long ago."

"Anyhow, thar's a notice up thar," Ben Bone remarked.

"So we found, when we had a light to find it with," answered the new arrival. "We had used up all our matches, and were in something of a fix. But, how is it, good citizens; can we put up here and get grub and lodging, and care for our horses?"

"I venture to say ye can," spoke up Sedge-mund Kredge, proprietor of the Lion-and-Eagle. "I am proprietor of the only hotel in ther camp, and shall be wery glad to 'commodeate ye."

"All right, landlord; you are just the man we are looking for, I take it. Is this your shebang?"

"No; this hyar's ther International Saloon."

"Where I kin do ther proper thing in ther way of likker, if you ar' inclined that way," spoke up McFarland.

"Anyhow, hyar is whar ye want ter dismount," added Knock-'em-stiff, "fer all ther camp ar' congregated hyar, and every man of us is dyin' ter see what sort of critters ye ar'."

"All right; if that is the case we'll gratify your curiosity, if somebody will take charge of our horses. Come, Fred, down with you."

The foremost had dismounted while speaking, and the other now sprung out of the saddle lightly and stepped forward, the crowd surveying them critically in a hurried way.

One was a good-looking man of thirty, apparently, with a fine face, keen eyes and dark hair and mustache. He was well clad in a neatly-fitting suit of some serviceable texture. The other, the one called Fred, was apparently younger by a dozen years, was light of frame but good-looking, like the other. His face was innocent of beard.

"Go right in," remarked Kredge, "and your hosses will be seen to in ther wery best manner. Billy McFarland will see ter you ther same."

So, the crowd starting back into the saloon again, the strangers followed and entered with them.

"Wull, hyar ye ar'!" greeted the mayor, now, "an' what do ye think of us? I am mayor of ther camp, an' my name ar' Hen Dixon."

"Dixon? That's the name of the camp. Named after you, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir; named after me."

"I congratulate you."

"Thank ye fer that. Now, might we know who you ar'?"

"That's ther next in order," chipped in Knock-'em-stiff. "We likes ter give an' take, hyar."

"Perfectly correct," assented the new-comer. "My name is Reev Stapleton, and this is my brother Fred. We are out doing the wilds in the interests of an Eastern magazine."

"Might we inquire what that means?" asked the mayor, after a moment of thoughtful silence.

"Certainly," was the ready response. "You see, my brother here is equipped for taking photographs, and I write about the country in general and it is printed in a book—that is to say, the magazine I mentioned. Understand, now?"

"Yas; that makes et onderstandable, I reckon."

Attention in particular having been called to the younger brother, a more critical survey was taken of him.

He was a youth of certainly no more than eighteen, half a head shorter than his brother. His build was light, and but for a firmness about lips and chin it might have been said that he looked womanish.

Suspended from his right shoulder, and hanging at his left side, was a small, leather-covered box of peculiar look and arrangement. It was a Kodak camera of the best style.

What the reader has already guessed need not be kept longer as a secret.

These travelers were, in truth, Deadwood Dick, Junior, and his wife, Kate.

"Anything further I can enlighten you upon?" Dick asked.

"There his one point that hit might be well to mention, honored sir," spoke up Trystan Trinkle, the bum.

"What is it?" Dick inquired.

"Hit his customary for strangers to pay their footing by treating the 'ouse, sir," was explained.

"It is, eh?"

"Hit his, sir!"

"And no more'n fair, either," supported Ben Bone, "seem' as you wouldn't be hyer at all ef et hadn't been fer us."

"I certainly am under obligation to you," Dick admitted, "and am willing to discharge it in the way best suiting to yourselves. Are you all in favor of taking poison at my expense?"

"Hi can hanswer for Number One, hany'ow," exclaimed the bummer, as with a single stride he placed himself at the bar.

"And I guess ther rest of us ar' of ther same mind," declared Knock-'em-stiff, confidently.

"That seems ter be ther popular sentyment," Mayor Dixon observed, "and you can count me in et."

"All right; range yourselves at the shelf. Proprietor, here's a twenty," as he flipped a coin to McFarland. "Let the boys have whatever they call for, and you may hand over the change to the man with the biggest family."

"That hits Job Patience, sure!" some one announced.

"Yas; fer he have got ther biggest and only fambly in ther hull diggin's."

The crowd had pressed to the front, for such an occasion was not one to be slighted, and the barkeeper dealt out his "p'ison."

What is yourn goin' ter be, Mister Stapleton?" McFarland presently asked, as the rush began to subside.

"I never take anything in that line," was the answer.

"Yer don't take et!" exclaimed Knock-'em-stiff, in surprise.

"Not a drop, sir."

"Wull, you ar' a tenderfoot fer sure, you ar'! And don't ther leetle feller take none, neither?"

"Not any, sir," the younger brother responded.

"Wull, by 'arnal!" cried the peacemaker of the camp, "this knocks me stiff fer true, this hyer do. Who has got a piece of chalk? Anybody? I want ter put down a mark fer ther first galoot that ever struck this hyer camp what didn't take benzine."

The crowd laughed, and Dick was looked upon as something akin to a boy who wasn't out of his dresses yet. He smiled, but knew, and so did his little wife, that he was by far the manliest man in the room.

One thing we have not mentioned: when these strangers entered the saloon, a little dog had come frisking in after them.

It was one of the Mexican hairless variety, and after frisking around for a few moments, had crouched down at the feet of the younger of the "brothers," where it remained.

There was one man in the room who had an eye upon that dog—an eye of business, and that was Trystan Trinkle, the camp bummer.

Presently, after further talk all around, Dick and Kate left the saloon to go to the hotel, the mayor of the camp acting as their guide, and the little dog followed close behind them.

Before they had reached their destination, however, Trystan Trinkle had made sure of the little canine, and poking it under his arm, holding its mouth so that it could not bark or whine, he made off in the direction of the shanty of Dr. Witmore.

CHAPTER IV.

CONCERNING DR. WITMORE.

A LITTLE earlier Dr. Witmore's daughter and niece had been holding an earnest and anxious conversation.

Tella Witmore was a handsome girl, her beauty being of the sparkling brunette type; her eyes large and flashing, and her lips a richest red.

Nola Jarvis could be called no less beautiful, though she was a blonde, with a dainty pinkness to her skin and the finest of sunshiny hair. She was a trifle the taller of the two.

Supper was over, and they were just clearing away the things when we look in upon them.

The faces of both were somewhat saddened.

"Did you notice that papa did not eat anything at all?" asked Tella.

"Yes," responded Nola. "And did you notice how absently he talked? That is, how strangely?"

"Yes; and I do not know what to make of it."

"I know it worries you, Tella, dear."

"You are right; it worries me more than I dare admit even to myself. What if—if he really should lose his reason?"

"Awful!"

"And you know how he deceived us."

"Perfectly well; but, what could we do?"

"Nothing but just what we have done. We accompanied him here, and here we must remain with him until time tells us what more to do for the best."

"When we came West with him, it was clearly understood that it was only for a recreation trip, for his own good, and that at the end of a month we were to return. Now we have been here close upon half a year."

"I have heard men here speak of his spells, too; do you know what they mean? Others have noticed it, you see."

"I have heard the same thing, dear, but did not like to tell you. I suppose they have noticed how wandering his thoughts are at times."

"And it is all the dogs, do you not think so?"

"It surely is."

"I wish they would die, every one."

"So do I, if that would be for the better; but I do not know."

"Where do you think he has gone to now?"

"He went in the direction of the dog-pen, but you know there is no use looking for him there. He goes further, wherever it is, and I cannot guess."

They paused in thoughtful silence.

"Dare you suggest to him that you would like to return home?" Nola asked, the next to speak.

"I am almost afraid to do so," was the response, "and yet I know I ought. I am getting afraid to remain here longer."

"On his account?"

"Yes; and—and our own."

"I believe our thoughts are the same."

"Yes; I am sure they must be. We are in a bad place, and are helpless. I am sure most of these rough men are none too good for almost any crime."

"There is not one of them I would trust, unless it be Mr. Patience."

"Yes; or that old scout, Zephyr Zeke."

"True; I did not think of him. Did Mrs. Patience tell you anything to-day?"

"Yes."

"The same thing she told me, I do not doubt."

"I do not know."

Again a pause.

"Nola," Tella presently spoke, "there is no use in our trying to hide the truth from each other any longer."

"I know it, Tella dear; but I would not alarm you for the world."

"Yet I think it is about time for us to alarm each other, and for us to act together."

"I know it, I know it, but what can we do, and your father as he is? Oh, if some help would only come to us! We have delayed writing too long, don't you think we have?"

"Yes, by far. Had we written two weeks ago, and sent our letter by some one to be posted, it would have reached New York by this time, and perhaps our friends would be on their way here."

"The best thing, then, is to write without further delay."

"How will we get the letter started?"

"We must have it ready, and the first one who leaves the camp can take it for us. We generally know when any one is going to the post-office town."

"It must be done this very night."

"And it shall be."

They went on with their work, and scarcely another word was spoken until it was done. Then Tella produced paper, pen and ink, and sat down at the table to write the letter of which they had been speaking.

Nola interrupted.

"Had you not better have some other work at hand, Tella," she cautioned, "so that you can thrust the letter out of sight and pretend to have been doing something else if your father should come?"

"You are right, Nola," the other agreed. "Hand me that sewing I was doing this afternoon."

It was done, and the young lady began her letter.

She had written no more than the place and date, however, when she stopped.

"Whom am I going to write to?" she asked.

"Why, to your uncle, are you not?"

"I intended to; but I have another thought."

"Walter Hargreave?" with a smile.

"Yes," Tella admitted, with a blush. "Would he not have a double interest in responding quickly?"

"But your uncle must not be slighted," Nola reminded. "You had better write to Walter Hargreave and to Boardman Witmore both."

"I will."

She began, her pen flew rapidly, and there was no interruption until two letters had been written.

"There," she said, as she let fall the pen, "it is done; but, as I fear, too late. Shall I read them aloud to you?"

"Yes; but in a low tone."

"Very well; pay attention."

Tella began and read both letters, as follows:

"DIXON'S DEPOSIT, OCT.—, 18—.

"UNCLE BOARDMAN:—

"I write this to you in haste, and without father's knowledge. We greatly fear that father is losing his mind. As you must suspect now, he deceived us all in saying that he intended this as a brief trip for recreation. He is settled here in this place, the wildest place you can imagine, and is collecting dogs as he did in New York. Will you not come to us at once? We fear that we, Nola and I, are in personal danger, too. There is only one other woman in this place, and we are surrounded by the most evil-looking men you ever saw. Father seems not to realize it as we do. Please come to us at once, prepared to take father home. This should have been written weeks ago, but has been put off till now."

"Yours in alarm,

"TELLA WITMORE."

After the signature followed directions how to reach the place, given as clearly as the writer knew, telling where it was located as nearly as possible.

The other letter read like this:

"DIXON'S DEPOSIT, OCT.—, 18—.

"DEAR WALTER:—

"You will forgive me for my long silence when I tell you there is no post-office here, and that we have been here for many long, weary weeks. I have just written to my uncle, and must write to you, though it may be days before I may get a chance to send my letters out. Nola and I fear that father is losing his mind, and we are in a rough place, surrounded by villainous men. If he starts to rescue us, you come with him. If he does not, I know I need not urge you to come as quickly as you can. It may be too late, for we cannot tell what may happen. We are in daily dread, though no one has offered us harm or insult; but if father loses his mind what may not happen? Do not hesitate a moment when this reaches you."

"With fond love

"TELLA."

"Are they all right?" Tella asked.

"I have only one fault to find with them," was the response.

"What is that?"

"Too short."

"I did not dare to take any more time. I have added at the bottom—'Written in great haste.'"

"They will have to do. Now, seal and direct them as quickly as you can."

This was speedily done, and the letters were put out of sight in a nook where they were not likely to be discovered.

"Now, Tella," requested Nola, "will you tell me what Mrs. Patience told you? We have agreed to be open with each other, you know."

"Yes, I will tell you. You know she has told us before that it is the joke of the camp that the men want her children to hurry and grow up so they can marry them."

"Yes; and a rough joke, too."

"Well, she told me from her husband she learned some rough rascal has said there was no need waiting for Job Patience's girls; that Doctor Witmore had two already grown."

"The same as she told me; and I think she told us to warn us, don't you?"

"Yes."

"If they dare to handle our names that way, what may they not dare? We must never be without our pistols in our pockets."

"Not for a moment."

Just then a heavy step sounded without.

The young ladies seemed to recognize it immediately, for they caught up their sewing and were busily at work when the door opened.

It was Dr. Witmore who entered.

A tall, handsome man, of commanding presence, but now with a dark look upon his face and a strange gleam in his eyes that was not natural.

"Another dead one," he muttered, as he flung himself upon a chair. "Another dead one. They haven't the stamina to give me satisfaction, curse them! But I will succeed, I vow—"

There he caught himself, looking up quickly, and for a few minutes reason appeared to be alive in his eyes. It soon faded, however, and the strange light took its place and he resumed his muttering.

"It must be changed, must be changed," he grated, with clinched hands and burning eyes. "Experiments are of no value unless upon the real subjects. I will show them yet. They called me mad, but they do not know me. I am at the very door of the greatest discovery of the age. I will show them!"

CHAPTER V.

DOCTOR WITMORE'S MANIA.

THE girls had looked at him in a horrified way, and exchanged glances.

Shouting without, in the direction of the saloon, aroused the doctor from his mad reverie.

"What was that?" he asked.

He was, for the moment, his natural self.

There was something peculiar about his malady, to call it such.

In the morning he usually got up in perfect strength of mind, seemingly, and would continue so till afternoon.

In the afternoon he would spend some time among his dogs, and from that time his madness would grow upon him till it reached its height, and he would disappear.

Where he went no one was yet able to say. Once the girls had followed him, but discovering them, he had ordered them back so almost fiercely that they had not tried it again.

Sometimes he would be gone till late in the evening, and when he would return he would be exhausted, and would throw himself upon the floor and fall asleep almost immediately. No wonder the girls had become alarmed, considering their surroundings.

Tella responded to his question.

"Some one shouted, she," made answer.

"There it is again. Whom can they be calling?" and throwing open the door, he stepped out to listen, the girls following.

They heard the exchange of shouts between Ben Bone and the man in Perdition Pass, and saw the crowd set out for the foot of the pocket.

"Ha!" the doctor suddenly exclaimed, when the crowd had gone, "I had almost forgotten something. I will be back in about an hour, my children. Close and secure the door."

"Oh! papa, do not leave us alone!" Tella pleaded. "We are really afraid to stay. Can you not put it off till morning?"

"Afraid? What are you afraid of?"

"We are in a very rough place, papa, and when you are out there is no one to defend us."

"Why, there is no danger here, girls. These men are rough, it is true, but they would not harm a hair of your heads. Do not be afraid of them. They know only too well what would be the consequence if they did. You are as safe here as though you were in New York."

With that, and a light laugh, he turned and went off in the darkness.

Tella, with tears in her eyes, closed and barred the door, and sunk weeping upon a chair.

"Do not weep," Nola tried to cheer her.

"Your father seemed quite like himself then, do you not think so?"

"He did for a time, but that frightful look was coming again into his eyes as he turned away. Oh, Nola, I know that something dreadful is about to happen."

"No, no; we will not believe that, sweet sister; we will hope for the best. We will forward the letters by the very first chance that offers, and I am sure we can hold out until help comes."

"You speak what you do not feel, and I know it. You cannot deceive me. But, we are here and must make the best of it. Let us get our

revolvers ready, and have them in our pockets at all times. We will not put that off another moment."

"I agree with you in that, my pet. Here they are."

She had opened a cupboard while speaking, and now took two small and pretty revolvers from a shelf.

They looked to the weapons, making sure they were in good condition, and put them in the pockets of their dresses.

"There," cried Tella, with a light laugh, "now I do not feel quite so timid."

"Nor I," added Nola. "Perhaps we have magnified the thing. Your father may be right. We will send the letters, however."

"Yes; we must delay no longer about that."

They fell into a more cheerful strain of conversation, and the time slipped by faster than they thought.

A heavy step without was the first that aroused them.

"Why, it is your father," exclaimed Nola. "He has returned sooner than he thought he would."

"No; see the time," and Tella pointed at a small clock on a shelf. "It is more than an hour since he went out."

There was barely time for this exchange when the steps reached the door and a knock was heard.

It was a knock such as the doctor usually gave, and Tella opened the door without a suspicion that it might not be he.

To her consternation there stood no less a personage than Ben Bone, and with a scream she endeavored to close the door, but he stepped forward and prevented her from doing it.

"Don't be skeert, leetle gals," he said, with a laugh; "nobody is goin' ter harm ye—"

Both the young ladies uttered another cry, then, for another man stepped in—none other than Trystan Trinkle, the camp bummer, and he closed the door behind him as he entered.

Under his arm he had the dog he had captured only a few minutes before.

"Thar, thar, now, don't take on so," Mr. Bone tried to pacify, "fer we don't mean ye no harm at all. Is ther doctor in?"

"N-no, sir; he is out," faltered Tella.

"Out, eh? That's bad. We want see him on biz, me and Trys, hyar. We has got a leetle dorg, as ye see, and we knows yer dad buys 'em up fer spot cash. How soon will he be in?"

"We expect him at any moment," answered Nola. "We thought it was he when you knocked."

"Haw! haw! Et wasn't, was et? Waal, we'll jest sot down and wait fer him. Ye see, I spotted Trys when he collared ther purp, and sez I to meself: 'Thar, he is in fer a fiver, and I'm in fer half of it;' so I kem right along after him ter make him go snacks with me. See? My! but you have got et cozy hyar, ladies."

"Hit his has neat ha nest has Hi hever see hin me life," declared Trinkle.

"And two of ther sweetest leetle gals in ther hull darn world; hey, Trys?"

"That's what they his, band no mistake habout that," the bummer agreed. "Hi love to look hupon 'em, hon me 'onor Hi do."

"You insult us!" cried Tella. "You had better go away, and come again when papa is in. We do not want you here."

Her hand was in her pocket, as was also Nola's in hers.

"Bless yer purty faces," cried Knock-'em-stiff, "yer needn't take no insult out o' that; ye means et, every word! You said yer dad would soon be in, so we'll wait an' see him. Insult ye? Bless yer hearts, my dears, if any galoot insulted ye in my hearing I'd knock him stiff fer a fact, and don't ye forget it."

"Bet yer life hon hit," echoed the bummer; "hard me, too."

"Of course we would," urged Mr. Bone. "Only let ary galoot in this hyar camp look cross-eyed at ye, either one of ye, an' ef thar wouldn't be one citizen less, then I'm a liar, that's all."

"Well, we are glad to know that, sir," observed Nola, the braver of the two, feeling that she must say something.

"An' I mean it, too," insisted Knock-'em-stiff.

"Hand so do Hi," from the bummer.

"Do yer know whar yer dad has gone, gals?" the bullwhacker asked.

"No," responded Tella, "but he will certainly be back shortly. Since you are our friends, as you claim, you may remain till he comes."

"Waal, we reckons et would be as we say about that 'ar, anyhow," Knock-'em-stiff growl-

ed. "But as ter bein' yer friends, we'd jest almost nat'rally die fer ye, an' that's ther truth."

"Hand you can bet your boots bon hit, too," from the bummer.

"Et's a pity ther camp ain't got a good many more like ye, that's all I kin say," remarked Knock-'em-stiff.

"You har' right when you say that," agreed Trinkle.

"Ye see, et ar' like this hyar," Mr. Bone proceeded to explain: "Thar's a good many darn nice young fellers hyar what would git married in a minnit, ef they only had somebody ter marry—"

"We must request you to change the subject, sir, at once," spoke up Nola, in a commanding tone.

"Bless me, but you is all-fired p'tic'lar," the fellow complained. "I was only goin' ter say that if this camp had a good many more like you two, et would be a good deal better off 'n what et ar'."

"Perhaps. Say no more about it."

"But I must, gal; can't help it, ye see. Yer beauty sort o'—"

"Not another word!"

Nola drew her revolver from her pocket as she spoke, but an unfortunate thing happened.

The hammer caught in a fold of her dress, and the weapon was jerked out of her trembling hand before she could raise it.

At sight of it the faces of the two wretches had paled, but when it dropped to the floor Mr. Bone set up a loud laugh, and quickly drew his own big six-shooter and presented it.

"I didn't think et of ye, gals," he said, "really I didn't; but if that is yer game, two of us can play at it, ye see. No more tricks like that, now, if you please."

Nola and Tella, with blanched faces, drew back, trembling, into a corner.

"I tell ye not ter be skart," the ruffian tried to impress, "fer we don't mean ye no harm in ther world; but at the same time we can't allow ye ter be pointin' sech dangerous playthings at us. An' as fer what we say—wull, words don't kill, an' I guess we'll say about what we please."

"And I shall tell my father the moment he comes," cried Tella.

"Yer is welcome ter do that; we don't keer a heap fer him—anyhow I don't. He's gettin' batty, whether ye know et or not. He's off his balance ter a sartain degree."

Thus were the fears of the girls confirmed—that the doctor's condition was known to the camp at large.

"As I was a-sayin'," the ruffian resumed, "this town is bad in need of women, an' you two might have ther pick of ther flock, ef ye would only make up yer minds ter git married. Thar's Billy McFarland, at ther saloon, as nice a young feller as ye kin find, he'd take either one of ye, an' I know et. An' then thar's Kredge who keeps ther hotel, he'd jump at ther chance. Darn et, gals, yer is standin' in yer own light, yer is."

The trembling girls made no response.

"Yas, right in yer own light," the rascal repeated. "Thar's two of ther best chances yer will ever git in ther world. An' then when it comes down to ther rank an' file of us, thar ain't a galoot in ther camp but would take ye up like a snap. I'd go in on that lay myself, I b'lieve. Why, ther hull camp—"

What more might have been said will remain unknown, for at that moment the doctor's step was heard, and the next moment he opened the door and entered.

A glance was enough to show that he was not himself. In his eyes burned that dreaded light that told of a disordered mind.

He stopped short on seeing the two men, and looked from them to the girls.

For a second the light of reason appeared in his eyes, but it was gone as quickly. Catching sight of the dog in Trinkle's lap, he uttered an exclamation of delight.

"Ha! just what I want!" he cried.

"An' it's your purp, fer ten dollars," spoke up Knock-'em-stiff.

The eyes of the bummer flew open wide, and he awaited what the doctor would say to that. For his own part, he would not have dared to ask five dollars, though the doctor had paid that sum on one or two occasions.

"I'll take him," was the doctor's quick jump at the bargain. "Here is the money. Where did you get such a beauty?"

"Hoh, we picked 'im hup," answered the bummer. "E his ha beauty, hain't 'e, sir?"

"It certainly is a beauty," the doctor agreed.

"Greatly obliged to you, my good men. If you get any more, do not fail to bring them to me."

"Yer kin bet yer life we won't," assured Knock-'em-stiff.

"Father," Tella now spoke up, "these ruffians have grossly insulted us, and I hope you will turn them out immediately."

The doctor glanced at his daughter, but did not appear to see her. All his thoughts seemed centered upon the dog. His mania ran in that direction.

With a leer at the trembling girls, Knock-'em-stiff and the bummer withdrew, Knock-'em-stiff holding the money, and the door closed after them. The doctor immediately gave all his attention to the dog, and the girls burst into tears.

CHAPTER VI.

DICK BEGINS WORK.

THE morning dawned clear and bright over Dixon's Deposit.

Deadwood Dick and his wife "pard" were up early and taking in the bracing air on the piazza of the hotel.

The "piazza," however, was only an apology for one. It was narrow and illy made, and little credit to the miserable "shebang" it adorned. However, it served the purpose.

"Well, Kate," Dick asked, speaking the name in low tone lest it might be overheard, "what do you think of this hole?"

"I consider it a rough place, Dick," was the response. "It looks to be about as lawless a place as one can well imagine. I hope we shall not have to remain here a great while."

"Which I do not think will be necessary. It looks like plain sailing, unless something unforeseen turns up to balk us."

"I hope nothing will hinder us, then, for I would not want to spend many days here."

"The dog seems to be gone, sure enough."

"Yes, that is so, or the little fellow would be at my feet. When shall you commence inquiry?"

"Oh, as soon as I come to talk with the landlord. I take that to be Doctor Witmore's shanty down yonder."

"What leads you to think so?"

"You notice there is a sign on it."

"So there is, but it can't be made out from here."

"That is the place, I think we shall find. And, hello! what's this? Here is a shoemaker's sign, as true as you live."

"What interest have we in that?"

"Why, I can have my saddle sewed up, no doubt. I'll pay the cobbler a visit as soon as we have had breakfast."

Just then their landlord appeared, his ruddy face glowing like the rising sun in a fog.

"Hello," he greeted, "how did ye sleep, gentlemen? I hope ye had a very nice night's rest of it, and feel like the jolly boys ye are."

"Yes, we rested pretty well, thank you," Dick responded. "This is a wild place, sir."

"Well, yes, a little that way, I suppose it seems to you."

"Must be up near the Line, isn't it?"

"It is in Canada, sir, near as I can come at it; though some hold that it is in ther States."

"Doesn't anybody know?"

"Not very sure, sir; that is, not sure enough to swear to it; and that is again, nobody but Johnny Bull and Yankee Doodle, sir."

This naturally led to inquiry as to who these personages were, and Dick got a good deal of information in a short time, information that was of value in a local way.

"You haven't seen a little dog around this morning, have you?" Dick asked, when there was a break.

"No; I am very sorry to say I haven't," was the answer. "Have ye lost one?"

"Yes; my brother here had a little cur of which he was quite fond, and it was with us when we got here last night, but we haven't seen it since."

Sedgemund Kredge rubbed his fat chin for a moment, and remarked:

"No; I haven't seen it, sir, but I know wery well where it is; or anyhow I wenture to say I do."

"Well, where do you think it is?" asked Dick. For answer, the landlord pointed down the pocket toward the shanty Dick had already hit upon as being Doctor Witmore's.

"Down there?" Dick queried.

"Doctor Witmore's."

"How has it come there?"

"Stolen and sold to the doctor, I have no doubt."

"What, a doctor dealing in dogs?" Dick questioned incredulously. "I did hear an unusual number of canines last night, come to think of it."

"You have hit it," said Kredge.

"What does he do with them?"

"Nobody knows."

"That is strange. I shall have to give him a call, I guess, and see if I can find our little cur. What manner of man is the doctor?"

"A wery fine man, sir, when he is right."

"Drinks, eh?"

"Oh, no; but he has spells."

"Spells? What do you mean by that?"

"Why, he gets sort of out of his head sometimes."

"Oh, I see. Does he live alone?"

"You'll say not, I opine, when you see his two pritty gals. Scott! I would not be a bit s'prised if you fell in love with 'em at sight."

"If that's the case, all the more reason why we must go and see about that dog; eh, Fred?"

"Yes, positively," the younger brother answered with a smile.

Dick asked a number of questions regarding Doctor Witmore and his affairs, and by the time he had done, breakfast was announced.

Now the Lion-and-Eagle had no females enrolled on its pay-list, but it did have a Chinese cook who could tickle the palate of almost anybody, considering the limited supplies he had to select from, and Dick and his "pard" made out a good breakfast.

When they had done Dick spoke about the saddle he had mentioned, and went out to get it for the purpose of having it repaired.

He had made inquiries of the landlord concerning the cobbler, and had learned that such work was right in his line.

So, he and Kate went over to pay their respects to this son of Crispin.

The latchstring was out, and Dick pulled it and went in.

The cobbler was on his bench hard at work.

The latchstring was out, and Dick pulled it and went in.

What he was making did not appear clear at sight, but it looked like a set of harness of some sort, but certainly not for a horse.

"Good morning," Dick greeted.

"Morning," responded the cobbler.

"I believe your name is Stanislaus Poor."

"So it is, sir."

"Mine is Reev Stapleton, and this is my brother Fred. Consider us introduced. I've dropped in to see if you can repair this saddle for me. We'll wait and chat with you, if you can do it at once."

The cobbler had evidently made up his mind that the callers were clever fellows, so he became a little more open with them.

"Sorry, gentlemen," he said, "but I can't fix it this morning. I have a job here that must be done by noon, and it is goin' to make me hurry to get it done. I'll do it this afternoon, however, if that will do as well."

"I noticed that you seem to be hard at work," remarked Dick, "and I have been trying to conjecture what it is you are making. May I inquire what it is?"

"You ask me something that I can't answer," was the reply.

"You don't care to tell, eh?"

"Not that, sir; I don't know what it is."

"Well, well, that is strange. For whom are you making it?"

"I don't know that I orter tell, but then I don't see the harm in that. I'm making it for Doctor Witmore."

Dick took an active interest in the matter at once, whatever his interest in the doctor was, and that had not yet appeared.

"The landlord at the hotel was telling me something about this Doctor Witmore you mention," he observed. "Seems to be an odd character. Now, what on earth do you suppose he means to do with a thing like that?"

"You ask me too much, sir. A harness, maybe, for some of his dogs."

Dick was looking at the peculiar thing with great interest. It was not put together yet, but lay cut in various forms, and was a skeleton of straps, belts, bands and buckles.

"It has played the dickens with a side of leather, anyhow," he observed.

"Yes, and more," was the response. "But, then, I am to be well paid for the job, and it don't matter to me. I'm going to ask him what it's for when he comes after it, though."

"The doctor has money, eh?"

"Plenty of it, and isn't close with it, either. I came here as poor as a church mouse, but when this doctor came along he set me right up. It was his money that provided all the stock you see about me, and the dog collars I've made is a caution."

Stanislaus Poor had shown himself a man of intelligence, if not indeed some education, and Dick like to talk with him.

He and Kate had taken seats on a bench near by, and watched him at his work while the conversation ran on. Dick's inquiries so far, here and elsewhere, had been mainly concerning Doctor Witmore.

"He is a good patron, truly, and no wonder you want to please him," Dick remarked. "If you don't know what that thing is, however, nor what it is to be used for, how can you be sure that you are making it right?"

"Oh, my directions are plain enough; besides, here's a drawing I am to go by to know when I'm done."

"I should think you would need something of that kind," Dick said, laughing. "Will you let me look at it?"

"Yes; for I haven't been told not to let any one see it."

He passed a piece of cardboard to Dick, on which was a drawing of the wonderful thing the cobbler was making.

An exclamation escaped Dick as he looked at it. He recognized what it was.

"Do you know what it is?" asked Mr. Poor.

"It is the strangest looking object I ever saw," was Dick's meditative response.

"May I look at it?" asked the younger brother.

"Certainly."

Dick passed the card to Kate, and she looked at the drawing critically.

"Ever see anything like it?" asked Dick.

"I believe I never did," she responded, as she gave it back; and her eyes met Dick's in an inquiring way.

"I suppose it must be something in connection with the doctor's dogs," remarked Dick, handing the card back to the cobbler. "Well, we'll be going on. Fix up the saddle this afternoon if you can."

The disciple of Crispin made response, promising to have the saddle repaired before night, and Dick and Kate went out.

"What is the wonderful thing he is making, Dick?" Kate asked, then, as they proceeded in the direction of Doctor Witmore's shanty.

"It is a skeleton strait-jacket, with a belt for the waist and others for the neck, wrists and ankles. Once it is adjusted upon a person he is helpless, and by pulling a strap at the back his heels can be made to touch his head. It is a diabolical contrivance."

"Ugh!" with a shiver, "I should think so. And what do you suppose the doctor means to do with it?"

"Hard to tell, but perhaps we shall see."

CHAPTER VII.

MEETING DOCTOR WITMORE.

WHEN Dick knocked at the door of Doctor Witmore's shanty, presently, it was opened by the doctor's daughter.

"Good-morning!" said Dick, politely, lifting his hat to her. "Is the doctor in this morning?"

Tella had read their faces quickly, and was evidently favorably impressed.

"No; he is not in at this moment," she responded, "but I will call him. I think he is near by."

"We would like to see him, if possible," Dick announced.

"Will you come in? I will find him and tell him you are here. He has been out only a moment, and must be near by."

"Yes; we will step in and wait, if we may," Dick accepted; and he and Kate entered and took seats.

As they did so, Nola Jarvis came in from the room in the rear.

She gave the strangers a hasty but searching look, and her face lightened at once.

Tella was about going out, but Nola detained her.

"The letters," she said, in a low tone. "This may be our opportunity, Tella."

"True; I did not think of it," Tella answered.

"Pardon me, gentlemen," spoke Nola, "but do you expect to leave this place soon?"

"It is not easy to say," answered Dick. "We may remain here a week, or only a day or two, just as circumstances govern."

"The reason I ask, we have no post-office here, as perhaps you know, and we desire to send some important letters out at the very earliest opportunity. If you do go soon, will you take them?"

"With pleasure," Dick promised.

"But you must not let papa know anything about it," spoke up Tella. "I am sure we can trust you."

"You need have no hesitation about doing so," assured the Detective Prince. "I will take the letters now, if you so desire."

"No," objected Nola; "for since you are uncertain about the time of your going, we may have an earlier opportunity."

"Then may we have the pleasure of calling for them when we are ready to depart?" asked Dick.

"I think that would be best," decided Tella. "You must not let papa know, however, or it may hinder a very important affair. These letters should have gone weeks ago, as we realized only too late."

"Trust me," said Dick. "I will call for them, and should I find the doctor in, will make a pretense of having called to see him. Then, while I detained him, one of you can take the letters out and give them to my brother, who will be near at hand. If the doctor does not happen to be in, then of course it will be simple enough."

"Excellent!" exclaimed both the young ladies at once.

Tella turned to leave the room, but at that moment a step was heard, and she hastily whispered:

"Here is papa, now."

The rear door immediately opened, and Doctor Witmore made his appearance in the room.

He was in his right mind, as a glance was sufficient to assure his daughter and niece, and bowed on finding strangers present.

Deadwood Dick had given him a searching look, and now rising, said:

"I have the pleasure of greeting Doctor Witmore?"

"That is my name, sir," was the response. "What can I do for you, gentlemen? I believe you are strangers to me."

"We are strangers," Dick assured. "My name is Reev Stapleton, and this is my brother Fred. We have called upon a little matter of business that is not altogether pleasant."

"Indeed? Well, let me hear what your business is. Be seated again, sir, and I will hear you."

"Thank you," acknowledged Dick. "We came into this camp last night, sir, after getting lost in a blind canyon and some of your citizens helping us out, and had with us a Mexican terrier—"

The doctor was noticed to start.

"Go on, sir," he said.

"Well, to come right to the point, the dog is missing, this morning, and on making inquiries about it we have been directed to you. We understand that you have been making a collection of dogs, and it is possible that some fellow has stolen ours and brought it to you."

"At what price did you value your dog?"

The doctor put the question quietly, at the same time reaching into his pocket.

"Well, it is not so much the value of the dog as that we liked the little fellow and want to recover it if we can."

"Impossible; but I will pay you whatever price you will name."

"Then the dog is in your possession?"

"Yes."

"Why, then, can you not return it to us? I am willing to refund whatever sum you may be out by the transaction—"

"Impossible, sir; positively impossible."

"May I inquire why?"

"Under the circumstances, seeing that you are a gentleman and entitled to all the explanation and reparation I can make, I feel bound to tell you. In a few hours that dog will be mad with hydrophobia."

"Heavens! you do not mean it?"

"I speak the truth; hence I say it is impossible to return the creature to you. I stand ready to pay you your price, however, and to express my regrets that it is too late. You see, sir, I have been buying dogs for some time past, and this was brought to me last night in the regular way and I bought it."

"That being the case, of course there is no use making any fuss about it," said Dick. "The dog represented little money value to us, so we will take nothing. I am sorry to learn of its fate, however. You are interested in hydrophobia, then?"

"Yes, a little."

The girls noticed a suggestion of that terrible light in the doctor's eyes now.

"I have been somewhat interested in it myself," Dick fibbed, for what purpose we shall learn. "Pasteur has achieved wonderful things in that line."

The insane light flashed a degree brighter.

"Pasteur!" the doctor exclaimed, disdainfully. "He knows nothing about hydrophobia yet. I am on the eve of a discovery that will open his eyes for him. I am experimenting, and expect soon to have the thing perfectly in

hand, when I shall astonish the world and confer perpetual benefit upon mankind!"

"Indeed!"

"It is a fact! I have mastered the first half of the problem; I can induce hydrophobia. The next step is to cure it, and my theory cannot fail, for it is now in perfect harmony with the first step. That is to say, by one means you bring about the disease; by the opposite means you cure it. I am well along with a series of experiments now, and not without success. There is one drawback yet, but that will be overcome shortly. In fact, I am preparing for new experiments, and— But, this cannot interest you—"

"You mistake, sir," assured Dick. "I am deeply interested."

"Are you, though?"

"Yes. Why, sir, it seems to me that fame and fortune are within your grasp, and that—"

"Fie for the fortune!" sneered the doctor.

"But the fame—ah! that is what I am after; that is what I am hungering for. And I'll have it, too; I'll have it! You shall yet hear the world ring with the name of Doctor Witmore!"

The light was growing more intense in his burning eyes, and the flame needed but little fanning to make it leap to its height.

Before Dick could speak Tella Witmore broke in.

"But, papa, perhaps you detain the gentleman, and—"

Dick had glanced at her, and she, with the quickness of thought, shook her head as if to forbid further talk upon the matter.

At any rate, so Dick understood it.

The girl's voice seemed to bring the doctor out of his spell, for the light of reason returned to his eyes, and he cast a startled look about him, like one just awakened.

"Your pardon," he said, to Dick; "but what did you remark?"

"I said it is no matter about the dog, since you say it is impossible to return it to us. There is, however, one favor I would ask."

"And what is that?"

The doctor seemed all right again now.

"You have awakened all my interest in these experiments you mention. Would you object to my witnessing your experiments upon our poor little terrier?"

Like a flash that insane glow burst into a flame.

"It will be an excellent thing," the doctor cried. "You shall accompany me, and I promise to interest you. I shall be ready by that time for my new experiment, and you are just such a person as I would like to have. Yes, by all means; come here at three this afternoon, and we will go together to the place where I carry on my work. Success is mine at last!"

Intending to act upon the hint the doctor's daughter had given, Dick had risen to go, and did not delay his departure.

"Very well," he responded, "I will be on hand. For the present I will bid you adieu. You may look for me at three."

He opened the door and Kate preceded him out, and every action of the young ladies proved that they were eager to have them go.

"Yes, yes; do not fail to be on hand," the doctor called out. "I promise you greater things than you could ever anticipate. Be sure to come."

One of the girls closed the door, and he sunk upon a chair, while Dick and Kate retraced their steps toward the hotel.

"Yes, yes; success at last—at last!" the doctor repeated. "Now I see my way clear to the end."

The two unhappy young ladies used every endeavor to bring him out of his insane spell, and presently succeeded, as it was forenoon and the spells were easier to break then than later in the day.

"There, there," chided the doctor, coming as suddenly out of the fit as he had suddenly fallen into it; "what means this? Why are you caressing me so, Tella? Why, there are tears in your eyes!"

"Oh! papa," the unhappy girl cried, flinging herself upon his breast; "we are so unhappy here! Will you not return home at once?"

"Tut-tut! What is this I hear from my brave little Tella? Why, I thought you were enjoying yourself so well. There is no danger here, my child. But, then, I suppose you are lonesome. Never mind; a few days more and I shall come to the termination of my experiments, and then home we will go. Bear up a little longer, and it will soon end happily for us all."

Just a hint of that light was coming back to his eyes. Perhaps he felt his mind slipping, for

he rose suddenly and went out. The weeping girls turned to each other and laid their heads on each other's shoulders, sobbing aloud.

CHAPTER VIII.

DEADWOOD DICK DEFIANT.

"WELL, Dick, what do you think of Doctor Witmore?"

So asked Kodak Kate, as she and Dick turned away from the doctor's shanty.

"He is a candidate for Bedlam, sure," was Dick's decision. "Boardman Witmore was not mistaken."

"And what are you going to do with him?"

"Nothing just yet, but I think I shall have to make a prisoner of him before I can do anything."

"And why not do that at once?"

"I would, but for one thing."

"What is that?"

"That thing the cobbler is making."

"I am afraid I do not quite get hold of your meaning."

"Yet you heard all the doctor said. You are usually as quick as I to catch an idea, and often a good deal quicker."

"You want to learn what he intends to do with the strait-jacket?"

"Yes; and more. I am afraid he has a victim ready to put into it, and if so, the poor devil must be got out of his power somehow."

"Now I see. Yes; there may be something in that. Then you will keep your appointment with him this afternoon?"

"Why, to be sure."

"I am almost sorry I did not come here in my natural attire, Dick."

"Why so?"

"I feel so much sympathy for these girls that I would like to go to them and give them some encouragement."

"They will be all right, now that we are here, and I am heartily glad that you are in disguise, for this is a mighty hard hole, Kate, dear."

"I know it is, and I think I shall accompany you this afternoon if you will have me."

"That is not to be thought of," protested Dick. "I would not let you risk yourself in the doctor's den for the world. What if one of his accursed dogs should bite you?"

"What if one bites you?"

"Have no fear for me. I have faced worse foes than mad dogs, I think. Besides, I do not believe the doctor would allow it. No; I must go there alone."

"And what of me while you are gone?"

"Keep close to your room, and you will be safe enough. I am not afraid but that you can defend yourself, and I guess you are not."

Kate smiled.

"It will not be healthy for the person who might attempt me harm," she said, with something of Dick's own grimness.

"I fancy not, my peerless Kate," Dick agreed.

"Where are you going now?"

"Here's the International; suppose we drop in and see what is going on. It is very tame, no doubt, considering the time of day."

"All right; for I am not afraid to venture anywhere with you."

So they entered the saloon. A number of persons were there, two of whom drew Dick's attention at once.

One was a short, thick-set man, rather fat, with a broad face that reminded Dick of the caricatured Briton.

This man's nose was much swollen, one of his eyes was badly discolored, and he bore other evidences of a recent battle, looking as though it had been a hard one, too.

The other man was a long, lean and lank fellow, with the sharp face of the model Yankee. One of his eyes was completely closed, one of his ears was bruised, swollen and discolored, and a good many other items went to hint that he had been "the other fellow" in the fracas.

Needless to say these were Johnny Bull and Yankee Doodle.

Dick could not repress a smile as he looked upon them, but never a hint of a smile appeared upon their doleful faces.

They were seated on opposite sides of the room, and evidently too badly used up for work, had come there to while away the weary hours of the day while undergoing nature's repairs.

Dick and his "pard" had no more than taken a casual survey of them when Dick was accosted by Ben Bone, otherwise Knock-'em-stiff, who, striding forward, laid a heavy hand on his shoulder, demanding:

"See hyar, stranger, we overlooked a leetle matter last night, when you fu'st arrove, and

we wants ter make et straight now. What kentry do you b'long to?"

"What country do I belong to?"

"Yas; that's what I asked ye."

"Well, just remove your hand from my shoulder and I'll answer your question. Your grip is a little uncomfortable."

"Why, me bantam, ye talk jest as ef I had ter do et. That grip ar' ther grip of a giant, et ar', and ye couldn't break et ter save yer soul. Answer my question and I'll let up."

"You'll let up before, my friend. Take your hand off at once."

"Saay," and the fellow turned partly away to point at Johnny Bull, "do ye observe that 'ar critter settin' thar? And d'ye also squint a focus onto that one over thar?" pointing at Yankee Doodle. "Waal, them two fellers would jest nat'rally chaw each other up ef I would let 'em, but I won't. I'm ther peacemaker of this hyer camp, I am, and I make mention of this so's you'll know who ye ar' talkin' to. See?"

"I see that you have not taken your hand off my shoulder yet," retorted Dick, "and I'll give you just one second to do it in."

The bullwhacker tightened his grip still more. "Haw! haw! Why, sonny, I've a notion ter most nat'rally—"

Biff!

Dick's right hand had come suddenly into play, taking the fellow alongside the head, and Mr. Bone went careening over upon his beam-ends—so to say.

Every man in the room was upon his feet in an instant, and Billy McFarland, his face suddenly pale, exclaimed:

"You had better get out, my friend, while you can. Knock-'em-stiff will have your life for that cuff."

Dick smiled coolly.

"I guess not," he responded. "He commenced the circus, and I guess I can stay in as long as he can."

Knock-'em-stiff had brought up against the bar, and then fallen to the floor before he could recover.

With a wild bellow he now made haste to get upon his feet again.

"Yer blud ar' mine!" he shouted. "I'm goin' ter get a pint of et from yer snoot ther fu'st crack, an' don't ye doubt et! I'll pay ye fer that clip ye gev me, my bantam!"

Dick stood awaiting him, his arms folded.

Kate was standing a little back so as to be out of the way. She had no doubt as to what the outcome would be.

Up strode the terrible peacemaker, and reached out to lay hold upon Dick's shoulder again, with one fist ready to guard against attack.

Dick allowed him to come right up close, when suddenly his arms unfolded and the giant was turned half-around with a blow that fell upon his forearm and almost made him sick with the sudden pain.

"Maybe you will think better of it, presently," Dick remarked.

Surprise was pictured upon the face of every man who saw what had taken place.

The bullwhacker hugged his arm for a moment, hopping around on one foot as he did so, and his face was terrible in its rage.

"Curse ye!" he cried. "I'll see yer heart! Ef ye think ye hev done a smart thing, by ther blue smokes o' perdition I'll show ye that ye haven't! I'm ther peacemaker of this hyar—"

"Better call yourself the peace disturber," interrupted Dick. "You commenced this thing. If you want peace, stop right where you are. If you want fight, come on and I'll give you all you want of it. I'll make you a match for these other wrecks."

He indicated Johnny Bull and Yankee Doodle.

"Yer wull, hey?"

"I'll try hard, anyhow," answered Dick. "Three of a kind are better than a pair, you know."

By this time it had begun to dawn upon all present that the stranger was almost, if not quite, a match for the great peacemaker.

Now it was a fight in earnest.

Knock-'em-stiff himself had come to realize that he had tackled a tougher knot than he had imagined possible, but he had more to learn than that, as he was destined to find.

"Yer kin crow," he cried, "but yer won't crow long. I'm goin' ter mash that nose o' yours all over yer face. Put up, now, and do what ye kin, but I reckon it won't be much."

This time he did not reach for Dick, having found that did not pay, but came with arms up in true fistic style. The other met him in like manner, and they began to spar.

The Prince had measured his man by this

time, and knew he had demoralized far greater bruisers in his time.

The fellow was a giant in size and strength, but was too rum-sodden to hold out in a tussle, owing to lack of "stay there."

Dick allowed him to amuse himself for some time, in fact until he was panting not a little, only tapping him now and then on one arm or the other to let him know he was there.

"Curse ye!" the bully bellowed, finally, "ef I do hit ye I'll drive ye clear through ther side of ther shebang!"

"Haven't a doubt about it," answered Dick, "and for that reason I do not mean to allow you to hit me. When you get tired we'll stop and let you rest."

All present were now laughing and jeering, and Knock-'em-stiff was almost beside himself.

Well he knew that he must win the fight or stand forever disgraced in the sight of his fellow knaves, and at the same time well did he know he was no match for his opponent at boxing.

"I'll give ye a rest," he roared, "ther longest rest ye ever had. I'll show ye that I ain't called Knock-'em-stiff fer nothin'. I'll jest most nat'rally jam yer head through ther wall."

With that, and closing his eyes, he sprung forward, delivering blow after blow as he came.

By the time he had perhaps begun to wonder why he was not hitting anything, something happened to him.

Dick had sprung nimbly aside, and as the giant passed him he gave him a little clip under the ear, that lifted him right off his feet, and deposited him on the floor full length.

And there he remained, too, motionless.

Exclamations of surprise were heard on every hand.

"Darn me if you don't beat ther Dutch!" cried Billy McFarland. "I wouldn't 'a' believed et ef I hadn't seen et."

"Oh, he was only a blowhard," said Dick, carelessly. "I didn't want any trouble with him, but you all saw how it was."

"Yer sarved him right, me son," declared Zephyr Zeke. "That was jest what he has been wantin' fer a good long while, and I'm glad he's got et at last."

"Ang me hif hit hain't worth ha drink!" cried Trystan Trinkle, the bum.

About that time Hen Dixon, the mayor of the camp, walked in, and seeing the peacemaker laid out, an exclamation of amazement escaped him.

He was quickly apprised of what had taken place.

"My friend," he said to Dick, earnestly, "I'm a older man 'n what you ar', an' I'd like ter give ye a bit of 'dvice. Ther sooner ye get out of this hyar camp, ther better et will be fer yer health."

"You think so?"

"I know et. Why, Knock-'em-stiff will have yer life fer this, ef he has ter swim in blood ter git et."

"Well, I'm not going to run away, that is sure," declared Dick. "I guess I can play at his game as long as he wants to keep it up."

"Yas; but he'll get ther hull gang after ye," warned Billy McFarland. "You'd better git out while ye kin. You've crossed ther wu'st man in ther hull camp, an' he'll pay ye some-how."

"Nevertheless, I decline to run," Dick assured. "When he comes to you, you may tell him so, too. Tell him that I'm ready to meet him at any time, and ready to discount all the odds he has a mind to bring. I'll fight the whole camp, if need be."

And then, before they had time to swallow that and digest it, Dick and his "pard" had turned and left the place.

CHAPTER IX.

DICK'S ERRAND MADE KNOWN.

WHEN Dick and his little life "pard" returned to the hotel they found some one awaiting them—no other than Nola Jarvis, who had set out from the shanty soon after their departure and had been waiting ever since.

She was near the piazza when they came up, and advanced to meet them.

"You will pardon me, I hope," she spoke, "but my cousin and I are in sad need of help, and have determined to throw aside everything and come to you. Are you willing to hear me?"

"Most assuredly," answered Dick. "If there is anything we can do for you, you have only to mention what it is."

"Did you notice anything peculiar about my uncle, Doctor Witmore, when you were at the house?"

"Yes, I did."

"What do you think of his mind?"

"I am of the opinion that it is sadly unhinged."

"And you are right, too. I thought you did not notice it, perhaps, since you talked with him about his mania without seeming to notice that it was a mania, or that he was not himself."

"I noticed it at once."

"And don't you think he will grow worse instead of better?"

"I certainly believe he will grow worse."

"That is our greatest fear. You see how we are placed. Here we are, in a wild and wicked camp, among a horde of vile men, with no one to protect us. Of all the men here there are only two to whom we should have confidence to go for help."

"And who are they?" asked Dick.

"One is an old man called Zephyr Zeke, and the other is Job Patience, the only married man in the camp."

"And you think they are honest?"

"Yes; I believe they could be trusted."

"I am glad to hear that, anyhow, for I agree with you that this is a mighty tough spot. But what do you desire us to do?"

"We hardly know. We noticed at once that father seemed to take to you very strongly, and we thought perhaps you might be able to influence him to go away from here. Do you think you could, sir?"

"I am afraid not. Nothing but force can accomplish that, I think."

"Could you not alarm him in some way, so that he would be glad to go, for his own sake if not for ours?"

"No, it is not likely. If he will not go for the sake of his child and you, Miss—"

"Jarvis is my name, sir; Nola Jarvis."

"Nola," Dick repeated sadly, his thoughts flying back to the past for a moment.

"You have heard the name before."

"Yes; it is one who once was very dear to me. But, to finish, if he will not go on your account it is not likely that he will go on his own. He is blind to any danger that may threaten, you know."

"Yes, we do know that. Oh, sir, what would you advise us to do? We are perfectly helpless."

"Not quite helpless," assured Dick, "for I and my brother here are going to see you through."

"What—sir—I—"

"No, of course you don't understand, so I will explain; but you must not let your uncle find out anything about it, though you may tell your cousin."

"Really, sir, I am at a loss to know what you are coming at."

Dick smiled.

"I will tell you. I have come to this place on purpose to find your uncle and his daughter and you."

"You amaze me!"

"I don't doubt it; but, such is the fact."

"How did you know anything about us? How did you know where to find us?"

"I will tell you the secret, for I see the distress of mind you are in, and it may serve to cheer you and your cousin up."

Nola looked at him wonderingly.

"To begin with, I am a Government detective, and the report I shall make of this camp will not be flattering, I assure you. I am also an independent, going and coming at will. In short, I have the power of a United States marshal, without being under orders as such. That does not matter, however."

"You have, or rather your cousin has, an uncle in New York named Boardman Witmore. Some time ago he wrote to inquire about his brother, at various points here in the West, and finally my attention was called to the matter and I communicated with him at once."

The result was that he explained the case to me fully, and urged me to spare no efforts toward tracing his brother and finding him and bringing him back to New York safely. He told me all about his mania, and suggested that his silence was probably due to that, though he could not understand why you ladies did not write. It was that point that led me to look upon the matter in a serious light indeed."

"You can now understand why we brought a dog to the camp with us, and why we paid your uncle a visit so soon after our arrival. We had traced him here, and laid our plans accordingly. So, too, my object in pretending interest in his crazy idea about hydrophobia. I will keep my appointment with him this afternoon, and will then have opportunity to judge better of his

condition; after that I will take whatever course is necessary."

Nola's eyes had brightened while she listened, her cheeks were all aglow, and as soon as he stopped she exclaimed:

"Oh, how delighted I am! What good news this will be for Tella! Why, everything is changed, now! I was sure we could trust you, but we had no idea that you had come here to find and rescue us."

"Mind, not a word of this to any one," Dick enjoined. "And you must urge your cousin to keep the secret."

"Oh, you may trust us."

"I know it, or I would not have told you; but I want to impress it on your mind."

"And shall we not tell them of another secret, Dick?" spoke up Kate.

"Your secret, little pard?"

"Yes, Dicky."

"All right; only that must be even more faithfully guarded. Miss Jarvis, this young gentleman whom I have called my brother is really my wife Kate. You may trust her as you would your cousin. Mind that you do not betray her secret."

"Impossible!" Nola gasped.

"Not impossible, but the truth," assured Kate, smiling. "I have been eager to let you know, so that I might be able to offer you womanly sympathy. Take care not to let the secret out."

"Never fear," Nola assured. "Now I must hasten back to let Tella know of the good news. How glad she will be!"

"And the letters you have written, which you wanted us to take out," said Dick; "I suppose they were for your uncle, eh?"

"Yes; one was to Tella's uncle Boardman, and the other was to a young man named Walter Hargreave, Tella's lover."

"I have heard of him," acknowledged the detective. "Mr. Witmore mentioned him in his letter to me. He has started for the West, but I have doubts about his finding this place."

"Who, Mr. Hargreave?"

"Yes."

"That will be good news for Tella. It will be useless for us to send the letters now, so we will destroy them."

"Is there anything we can do for you at once?" asked Dick.

"No; all we ask is that you will stand ready to keep us from harm. We have been filled with terror constantly, knowing how helpless we were. I hope you will be able to induce uncle to go away very soon."

"If not that, it is my intention to take him, anyhow," assured Dick. "In a day or two at most you will bid adieu to this camp."

"Oh! I am so glad! I must run at once to Tella and let her know."

It was wonderful to see the change that had come over her spirits in so brief a time, and Dick and Kate stood watching her as she ran away.

"That will make them feel better, anyhow," remarked Dick, as they entered the hotel.

"Yes; and I am glad," responded Kate. "Do you think there is really the danger here they seem to have dreaded?"

"Not wanting to alarm you, Kate, but I believe there is. There are more evil faces here than I ever saw in any one camp of this size in my life, I believe. They look like a gang of pirates, with few exceptions."

"Then you must be careful, Dick. You have made a foe of that big fellow you upset at the saloon, and you know the warning the proprietor gave you."

"I shall try to be on the lookout for him," Dick declared. "I must see that old man, Zephyr Zeke, however."

"What will you do with him?"

"If the girl was not mistaken in her estimate of him, I may be able to use him to good advantage."

"Then I would set him to watch the fellow you whipped. There is no knowing what he may not attempt. You must not take any risks."

They had now reached their room, where they remained until the dinner alarm was sounded.

While they were at table their host, Sedge-mund Kredge, came in.

"I jest want to ask ye if it's true," he announced, excitedly, addressing Dick.

"Hard to say," answered Dick, smiling. "There are so many things untrue that it don't pay to believe more than half you hear."

"Yes, that's so; but I jest want to ask ye if it's so that ye knocked the wery dickens out of Ben Bone, him they call Knock-'em-stiff. Did ye do et, really?"

"Oh, that was nothing," Dick responded, with

a light laugh. "We merely had a little round and he happened to get the worst of it. I didn't do him much harm, I guess."

"Scott! do ye know that your werry life is in danger?"

"Do you think it is?"

"I know it is. Why, he has killed more than one man, and for cause no wuss than that, too. Wery likely he'll drop ye on sight the wery first chance he gets at ye."

"Oh, I guess he would not do that. If he does, and I find it out, it will go hard with him, I tell you."

The landlord looked at Dick in a puzzled way, trying hard to get it through his thick head what he meant.

"By the way," he asked, after a pause, "might I ask what country you belong to?"

"That seems to trouble you people a good deal," Dick made response. "That was what your Knock-'em-stiff wanted to know."

At that the landlord backed off in alarm.

"Oh! I don't want to know if ye don't want to tell me, not a tall," he declared. "Ye needn't answer if ye don't want to, sir."

Dick had to laugh at him, as did all who were present.

There were quite a number at the table, for the Lion-and-Eagle was well patronized.

Among others were some sports and gamblers of the worst sort, who had been sizing Dick up, as it is said, before the landlord's coming in.

"I don't see why I shouldn't gratify your curiosity, though," Dick rejoined. "I would have told Mr. Bone quite willingly, but he had a grip on my shoulder that I did not like, and refused to remove his hand when I asked him to. That was the cause of the trouble between him and me; not the question he asked."

"Oh!" said the landlord, with a breath of relief.

"I belong in this country," Dick informed.

This seemed to nonplus the landlord, and he had to scratch his head.

The others at the board cast glances from one to another, and Dick went on with his eating.

He and Kate were enjoying the thing to the full.

The landlord had informed them that the camp was in Canada, to the best of his knowledge and belief. Did Dick mean to have him understand that they were of that country? or did he hold the camp to be on Uncle Sam's ground? He did not question further, anyhow, but presently went out.

CHAPTER X.

DICK'S INTERVIEW WITH ZEPHYR.

AFTER dinner Dick and Kate went out again. This time Dick wanted to find the old ranger, Zephyr Zeke, to estimate for himself what manner of man he was.

Making some casual inquiry, he found Zephyr Zeke and Job Patience had been seen going toward the south end of the pocket only a little time previous.

"So, Dick and 'pard' walked down that way, and pretty soon made out two men standing in the shadow of the great divide that marked the location of Purgatory Pass where Dick had got lost."

The two men were in earnest conversation, as could be seen, but as Dick and Kate drew near and were observed they began to retrace their steps to the camp.

When the two parties met, both stopped, and Dick saw at a glance that the old mountaineer had something to say, so held his peace to allow him the first opportunity, as this would give Dick even a better chance to form a correct opinion of the man's character than if he drew him into conversation.

"Yer will pardon me, I opine, gentlemen, ef I take et on myself ter give ye a bit of advice, won't ye?" the old man asked.

"Freely," answered Dick. "Good advice is a thing a fellow can't have too much of."

"You ar' right thar, every time. What I was goin' ter say, ar', you hev made a enemy of ther wust man in this hyar camp, and it will be all yer life ar' wuth fer you ter remain hyar all night. Ye had better git out on ther quiet as soon's ye kin. That's what my advice ar' this time."

"I have no doubt but your advice is good, and that you have good reason for offering it," Dick made reply, "but I cannot accept it. My business will not allow me to leave Dixon's Deposit before to-morrow at earliest."

"I'm sorry ter hear that, an' yet I'm proud of yer pluck, too. Ther next best advice I kin offer ar', that ye do yer sleepin' ter-night with yer eyes and ears wide open. Reckon ye know what that means."

"Not to go to sleep at all, eh?"

"That's about it."

"Is your name Zephyr Zeke?" Dick now asked.

"That's what I am called."

"Well, we came down this way on purpose to fall in with you, learning that you had come down this way. And this, I take it, is Job Patience."

"That's my handle," Job assured.

"Ye wanted to see me?" the ranger questioned.

"Yes."

"What fer?"

"Well, I'm like old Diogenes, I'm out looking for an honest man, and I have been assured on pretty good authority that you fill the bill."

It was plain at once that the old mountaineer knew not how to respond to that, and while he hesitated Dick continued:

"And not only you, but your Pard Patience as well. Further, that you are about the only strictly out-and-out honest men the camp can show. How about it?"

"I don't know that we ar' ther only ones in ther camp, but I kin swear they ar' a scarce article," the old man made answer. "As fer us, we ain't angels by no manner o' means, but we try ter do what's right I reckon."

"That's all I want to know about you, then."

"Now kin we ask who gev us sech a clean bill o' health as that you jest said you had got of us?"

"If you won't repeat it I'll tell you," said Dick.

"And I don't know as we'll have any cause ter repeat et," was the rejoinder.

"Well, it was Doctor Witmore's pretty niece Nola Jarvis, who gave us the information."

"Bless her thumpin' little heart!" cried Zephyr Zeke. "But," he added immediately, "ar' you a friend o' them gals?"

"They haven't a better one," assured Dick.

The face of the old man lightened up, and he offered his hand.

"Hyar's one what's as good, and I don't keer a darn who or what ye ar'," he cried. "Give me yer flipper till I 'most wring et off'n ye."

Dick gave his hand, but the old man did not make much of a success at wringing it off, for he found it like a fist of iron attached to an arm of steel, and his pressure was returned with interest.

"That's ther kind of a grip I like ter feel onto my paw," the old fellow declared, "only jest a leetle less of et, ef ye please. You ar' a friend of them 'ar gals, ye say, and so am I; an' Job hyar is another. Bless their hearts, they don't know that I've slept these many a nights on ther ground near their shanty, ready ter aid 'em if occasion called for it."

"Do you mean to say you have done that?" cried Dick.

"That's jest what I have."

"Then you are just the man I want to tie to for this campaign. I've got a little work mapped out for you."

"I don't know at out et, young man. Seems as if I have got about all on hand that I kin hold up now. Thar's a devil of a lot of villainy afoot in this hyar camp, and no knowin' when it'll bust out."

"What do you mean?"

"Jest what I say. Thar's a plot afoot ter steal these two gals from ther doctor and marry 'em."

Dick's brow darkened.

"How do you know this?" he asked.

"Job hyar put me onto et, and he overheard et talked over 'tween ther p'isen whelps."

"And who are the gentlemen who propose to engage in that sort of business? I would like to take note of their names, if you don't mind."

"Waal, they ar' Sleek John and Gentleman Jo, two of ther meanest and most p'izenest gambler sports in this hyar ull camp. No doubt you seen 'em at ther hotel, where they git their grub."

Dick described two of those he had noted at table, and found they answered to the fellows the old man had named.

"Well, if that is their game, all the more reason why I need your help," he remarked. "We had better join hands in this thing, Zephyr Zeke."

"But, we're only four against ther hull blame camp," the old ranger reminded.

"I care nothing for that," cried Dick. "As I have already told Ben Bone, I stand ready to discount all the odds and fight it out on that line."

"An' by ther way, that 'ar same Benjamin Bone ar' one of ther tools these two villains mean ter use ter git at ther gals. He's too many fer

me ter tackle, but I had made up my mind ter shoot him like a dog at ther first sign."

"And serve him right. That's what we'll do, if it comes to that, and it will if they attempt to carry out their scheme. You don't seem to count the doctor in it at all."

"Ther doctor ain't in et. That man is wrong in ther head as sure's ye ar' born."

"I agree with you," said Dick. "But, let me tell you what my business here is, and then you will understand more than you do now."

So Dick went ahead and told what had brought him there, and all about it.

The ranger and his friend listened eagerly.

"And there you have it," Dick concluded.

"Now, here we are, four against the whole camp, or nearly so; but we'll discount the odds and go for them."

"You bet we wull!" agreed the ranger.

"Thar's one p'int ye seem ter have left out of yer story, though, pard."

"And what is that?"

"Ye haven't told us who ye ar'."

"Did you ever hear of Dick Bristol?"

"Don't reckon as ever I did," the old man answered, thoughtfully.

"Well, perhaps not. Have you ever heard of Deadwood Dick, Junior?"

"Deadwood Dick!" cried Zephyr Zeke, excitedly.

"Yes; Deadwood Dick. That is the name I am generally known by. There are few places where something has not been heard of me, I think."

"You don't mean to tell me you ar' ther same Deadwood Dickey that I uster hear my old pard Avalanche talk about so much, do ye?"

"Old Avalanche; did you know him?"

"I opine I did, some."

"Then no doubt you have heard all about me there is to tell. I am the same Richard of Deadwood."

"Put et thar," offering his hand again. "Ef you want ter fight ther hull blame camp, and another one or two throwed in, I'm with ye. I hev heard of you, and nothin' to yer discredit, either. Ole Averlanche jest worshiped ye, an' he never froze to a man who wasn't right."

They shook hands again warmly, for the memory of their mutual friend, and further talk about old times was had.

Meanwhile they were making their way slowly back toward the camp.

They had wandered from the business in hand.

Seeing that they were nearing the camp, and having yet more to say, Dick came to a stop.

"We must finish this business," he announced, "before we enter the camp again. I have more to say before we part."

"And so hev I," declared the ranger.

"Well, say your say first, then," Dick invited.

"I was goin' ter tell ye what Job and me was talkin' about. Ye see, as I did start ter say oncet, he wants ter get his fambly out of this hole, and wanted me ter help him. Now, this hyer is goin' ter be his best chance, don't ye 'gree with me on et?"

"I do," assured Dick. "If he wants to go at all, now is his chance."

"And you kin bet I do," Job spoke up. "I wouldn't stay hyer another month with my fambly fer ther hull pocket."

"Join with me, then," invited Dick, "and we'll help each other. The chances are that you can't take anything with you, but I'll help you to another start when you get out."

"I'll do it."

"What I wanted to say," Dick now proceeded to explain, "was this: This afternoon at three, I am going to go with Doctor Witmore to witness some experiment or other upon some of his dogs. I want a good opportunity to judge of the man's condition thoroughly, for one thing. While I am gone, Zephyr Zeke, I want you to have an eye out for the safety of my brother."

"Yer kin bet I wull do thet 'ar," the old mountaineer promised.

"I think he will stop at the doctor's shanty with the girls, and although he is pretty well able to take care of Number One, a little help in case of need will not come amiss."

"I should say et wouldn't. I'll see that ye don't git harmed, ef I kin help et," the old man promised, turning to Kate.

"And I haven't much fear that I shall," she responded.

"I do not know just when I will get back, as that must depend on the doctor," Dick said further: "but when you see him you may be sure that I will not be far behind him. Mind, now, to keep very still about all this; and you, Mr.

Patience, had better prepare to start at short notice, but do it very quietly."

A little further talk, and they separated and went their ways.

CHAPTER XI.

AN INVITING PROSPECT.

PROMPTLY at three o'clock Deadwood Dick presented himself at the shanty of Dr. Witmore.

The doctor was awaiting his coming, and it did Dick good to see how much more cheerful the young ladies were now.

As for the doctor, he was pacing the floor, and that peculiar light which has been several times mentioned was again burning in his eyes.

"Well, sir, here I am," Dick announced.

"So I see," was the response. "I was afraid you would not come."

As he spoke, the doctor took his hat down from a nail and was ready to set out at once.

"You had no room for such a fear as that," assured Dick. "I am too deeply interested to let any trivial thing stand in the way of my seeing your experiments."

"I am glad to find you still so full of enthusiasm. I tell you it is a great thing, Mr. Stapleton, this discovery that I am about to perfect. But, come, and we will talk as we go along."

"All right, sir."

The doctor led the way out, and Dick followed, after giving the girls an assuring look, and motioning that Kate would soon be with them.

Side by side the two set off in the direction of the dog-pen.

"Are you as full of enthusiasm over this thing as you were?" the doctor made inquiry.

"If anything, more so, sir."

"I am glad of it."

"You have interested me greatly," Dick declared. "As I told you, I have had much interest in this matter ever since Pasteur began to practice it, but not being a doctor, of course could do nothing to advance the great truth further."

Dick thought he would match the doctor's manner if he could.

"Pasteur!" the doctor exclaimed. "Pasteur is but an ass, as I will show him and the world in a short time. I am almost ready now to bring the profession out of darkness into light in regard to this matter. I will show Pasteur that he is but a child beside me in knowledge of hydrophobia."

"I can well believe nothing less," Dick encouraged.

"And well you may believe that. I can induce the disease; hence I must cure it—and I can. What more is asked? The dread malady will be in my own hands. When my discovery shall have been made known, what will be the result? Why, hydrophobia will be a thing of the past, and my name destined to burn forever in letters of gold upon the pages of history!"

"Wonderful!"

"And how would you like to share that glory?"

They had now reached the kennel where the howling and yelping dogs were confined, and as the doctor put the question he laid a hand on the door to open it.

"I would not dare ask you to share such fame with me," Dick responded. "It is for you, and you alone, sir."

"But I am willing to give you half the glory, if you will accept it. I am in need of help, as there is one part of my experimenting which I cannot accomplish alone. Help me, and if success crowns our efforts you shall have half the fruits."

"I'll do it, willingly."

"You mean it?"

"I do."

"All right; I shall hold you to your word."

The doctor now opened the door and stepped into the inclosure, Dick following at once.

Here were dogs of every sort and kind, almost, each one secured with a collar and chain, and most of them yelping and howling frightfully.

"None of these are mad," the doctor explained, as he closed and secured the door. "I have another place for those under the effects of the dread disease, and ready for experiments."

Having secured the door, he went straight to the building in the center of the inclosure.

Throwing open a door he stepped in, the detective keeping right at his heels.

Nothing was in the room, but a trap-door in the middle of the floor was open, and the head of a ladder appeared above it.

On the top of the ladder hung a lantern, and

when the doctor had closed the door, he took the lantern and lighted it.

"Now, I will descend first, or you may, just as you please. As you are not acquainted with the way, however, perhaps I had better lead you. Come right on, and do not have any fear."

With that, he placed foot on the ladder and began to descend, the lantern hanging on one arm.

Dick made sure his weapons were ready for use, and followed.

When the doctor reached the bottom, he held the light so that Dick could see.

They were now in a sort of natural cavern.

"I am putting you in possession of a secret which no other man at Dixon's Deposit knows anything about, sir," the doctor explained.

"You mean this cavern?"

"Yes. The man I bought my shanty of sold it to me, and he had kept the secret well. You see, he had been exploring it for gold, and if he found any he wanted it for himself alone, without sharing with anybody, and so he told no one."

"I see."

"Well, when I came along I offered him more than he was ever likely to find in the cavern, on condition that he would go away and still hold the secret, and he agreed to do so. He kept his word, and hence you find the secret a secret still."

The man talked rationally enough, but Dick noted that the insane fire in his eyes was growing brighter.

"And this is the place where you carry on your experiments, then?" Dick suggested.

"No; this is but the entrance. Come with me, and you shall soon see more of my admirable workshop."

The doctor waved his lantern in the direction he intended taking, and, as Dick had noticed, the cavern seemed to extend forward and downward.

Dick followed, wondering what was to be the outcome of so strange an experience.

For a considerable distance they went forward without speaking.

It seemed they must have covered a full half-mile before the doctor stopped.

Seemingly they reached the end of their journey. A chasm yawned at their feet.

"Are you still of the same mind?" the doctor demanded.

"I am," was the firm reply.

And Dick thought:

"I guess I can stand as much of this thing as you can, old fellow, even if you are crazy on the subject of dogs."

"Very well, the place is near at hand now," the doctor observed. "One more ladder to descend, and we are almost there."

"Lead on; and I'll be with you!" was the reply of the determined detective.

The doctor now reached over the ledge carefully with his foot, and as it came in contact with the round of a ladder he swung over boldly and hastened down.

Dick had noticed that now the insane light was at its height, and that the doctor was trembling from head to foot with suppressed excitement.

But the Detective Prince did not falter. He found the top of the ladder and followed down, on the alert for any danger, though hardly suspecting any foul play on the part of the doctor.

Little he dreamt of the terrible scheme at work in the veritable demon's mind.

Dick had almost reached the bottom of the ladder, where the doctor stood waiting as before, when he was suddenly overcome.

A hiss was heard, a damp mist fell upon his head and face, and in the same moment his head reeled and he realized that he was suffocating and must fall.

He knew no more.

When he came to, it was to find himself in a frightful situation.

He was lying on the hard floor of a cavern chamber, and a lantern was hanging on a spike not far away.

An effort to rise told him that he was bound securely, and a glance around discovered to Dick the insane doctor standing only a little way off, looking at the trussed detective.

The man's arms were folded, his chin rested upon his breast, and he was looking at his prisoner in a dreamy manner. The moment he saw Dick looking at him, however, his manner changed.

"Ha!" he cried, lifting his head, "you have come out of it, have you?"

He was now a madman indeed! His every movement proved it, while his eyes were like those of a wild beast of prey.

"It looks more as though I have got badly into it," Dick made response, in his ever cool way.

"Ha! ha! And so you have, too," the demon laughed. "You agreed to my proposition, however, and I am only holding you to the letter of it."

"You did not mention anything of this sort, however," reminded Dick.

"True enough; and this is only a precautionary measure to insure your filling your part of the agreement."

"Well, what are you going to do with me?" Dick inquired.

"I will tell you that presently. First let me show you how utterly you are in my power, and how useless it will be for you to resist me."

He stepped forward to where Dick lay, and stooping, took hold of something at his back.

This something he pulled and immediately Dick felt his head, feet and hands drawn backward until he feared lest he should be broken in two.

Instantly, too, a horrible truth flashed across his mind. This was the thing the cobbler had been making that morning, the dreaded strait-jacket which Dick had then thought might be intended for some poor victim.

Little had he thought he would be its first victim!

"What do you think of that?" the demon asked, with an insane laugh.

"It works like a charm," answered Dick, still with perfect coolness. "It is a trifle uncomfortable, however, so suppose you let up a little."

"Yes, I will. I merely wanted to show you how I have got you fixed. Another pull at this strap, and I could make your heels touch the back of your head. You are as hopelessly in my power as the dogs in my kennel."

"It does look that way."

"You do not seem badly frightened. I expected I should have a terrible time with you."

"Why should I be frightened?" the prisoner demanded. "I am as interested in this as you are, and have agreed to assist you."

"Yes; but I did not tell you what it was I required of you."

"Oh, that does not matter; I am ready for anything that offers. Do not delay on my account. It will be more comfortable, though, if you will let up a little on that strap."

The doctor did so, and Dick was given more liberty of limbs.

It was the strait-jacket, beyond all question, that he was in. He could feel the belt at his middle, the band around his neck, and the others on ankles and wrists.

"I will now explain in full what my intention is concerning you," the doctor asserted.

"As I have told you, I am able to produce hydrophobia in dogs, but the animals have not the stamina to live under my treatment for their cure. Now, as it is not in the interest of dogs that I am working, but of humanity, I have made up my mind to experiment upon human subjects. You shall be my first, and if you live under the trial, and get well, you shall, as I have said, share with me the glory and honor of my discovery."

"That is a big inducement," Dick remarked, ironically.

"A big inducement!" exclaimed the doctor, growing warm in his enthusiasm; "I should say it is, when I have it all my own way, anyhow. We will say nothing of that, however. Your chances are excellent, for you have the stamina of a dozen dogs, and a cure is almost certain. When you are well, then I will give you the honor of having it said that you lent yourself willingly to the test, in the interest of the race. It will be an honor second only to my own."

"What if I die under the treatment, as the dogs have done?"

"In that case I shall have to bury you somewhere, and you will count as a noble sacrifice upon the altar of science."

"Excellent!" cried Dick. "But, why keep me bound up like this? Why not let me be free, and so have the honor in fact as well as in name?"

"Do you think I am crazy?" the doctor demanded. "What could I do with you, raving with hydrophobia, unless I have you bound? You would kill not only yourself, but me too, perhaps, and I would be unable to do anything for you. Oh, no; I must have full control of you during your spell of madness."

CHAPTER XII.

FIGHTING FOR A RESPITE.

RICHARD BRISTOL was in a desperate strait. He strained his hardest to break the bonds that held his wrists.

Once let him get his hands free, and the

demon doctor, he thought, would be but a child in his grasp.

His strength was as nothing, however, against the well-made leather bands, and he exerted it only in vain.

This effort had been made quietly, while the doctor was speaking, and the doctor had detected nothing of it. When Dick spoke again his tone was calm.

"Well, when do you propose to begin this interesting seance?" he asked, in his matter-of-fact way.

"As soon as possible," was the response. "All is ready, except to give the dog its final touch, and then I'll allow it to bite you. In twenty-four hours you will be either cured or dead."

"But the chances, you say, are in my favor."

"Decidedly."

"And you said it is that little dog of mine that you were to experiment on next, did you not?"

"Yes; that is to be the one that will poison you."

"Very well; I am ready whenever you are, so don't delay longer on my account."

"I must first describe to you something of the process. First, I have constantly on hand one dog ripe for rabies. One hypodermic injection of virus brings on the disease in its first stage; another carries it to the climax and you have the true hydrophobia in its worst form."

"I see. You seem to be on the right track."

"I know I am on the right track. And I should have succeeded long ago, but it seems that dogs cannot bear up under the reaction. When I reduce the malady and proceed with the cure, they are so exhausted that they invariably die. With a human it will be different—at any rate I hope it will."

"So do I," supplemented Dick, with grim humor.

"Now, for instance," the doctor went on, "that little dog of yours has been bitten, and has had the first injection. I will go and give it the second, allow it to bite another dog, and then will bring it here to begin my experiment on you. You seem to be a man of rare courage, and are so interested in this matter that one might consider you insane. I expected you to rave like a madman at the very thought of it."

"How many varieties of dogs have you experimented on thus far?" Dick asked.

"As many as I have been able to secure."

"Have you experimented before on one like this of mine?"

"No; this is the first specimen I have had of that variety."

"You won't mind if I make a proposition, then will you?"

"Certainly not."

"Well, it is this: Why not carry out the experiment in full on this dog, and see how it will work? If the dog lives, it will save me the twenty-four hours delay I must undergo. You can free me, and I will assist you."

"No, no; it will not do," the doctor objected. "If larger and stronger dogs could not stand it, it is not likely this one will."

"Well, then, I have another proposition to make: You see, I thought this was only a matter of an hour or so. I did not suppose it would take so long, and my time is valuable. Let us go and get some other man to experiment on."

"There is not another man in the whole camp."

"Not another man in the camp?"

"Not such as you. You are the finest specimen I have seen in a long time. You are perfection, almost, and with you my experiment must be a success. Taking some of the weaklings at the camp, the chances of their recovery would not be half so good."

"Well, take the strongest man we can find, then. There is the giant bullwhacker, Knock'em-stiff; how would he do?"

"Too much rum in his system. No; I have made my choice, and you must lend yourself to my experiments for the benefit of mankind. I will go now and prepare the dog as I said, and will shortly return."

And so saying, he took the lantern from its spike on the wall and went away, and Dick presently heard him mounting the ladder.

"If I am not in the worst fix of my life I miss my guess," Dick said to himself, when left alone. "And the worst of it is, my ingenuity can devise no way out of it. The prospect is simply appalling, but I must keep my courage to the death."

There did not, indeed, seem to be any way out of it. His weapons had been removed, as he had ascertained at first, and no help was to be looked for in that dismal hole.

To get word to Kate or any one was out of the question. There was nothing for him to do but trust to circumstances and his own wit.

One thing gave him hope. The dog that was to be used in the experiment was a small one. Perhaps he would be able in some way to overcome it, and so spoil the fun for a time at least.

"Let me get free," he muttered, "and I will stop this sort of work for the doctor, or my name is not Richard of Deadwood!"

The doctor was absent something like half an hour, and on his return Dick heard the yelping and snapping of the dog he was bringing with him.

"Now for the demon's demoniac work to begin," he thought.

The doctor descended the ladder, and in a few moments the light of the lantern was seen, and he was soon on hand.

"I have been gone no longer than I could help," the mad experimenter offered in apology. "I have come back as soon as I could, and here is the dog, all ready for the test."

He put down a sort of large cage, in which the maddened animal was tearing around wildly, snapping and snarling and frothing at the mouth; and when the man had hung the lantern on the spike, he continued:

"Now, I will release the dog, and when it has bitten you I will dispatch it and begin the experiment. I am glad to find you still so brave and ready to undergo it."

"May as well be that way as any other," Dick remarked.

"Yes; but it is so different from what I expected. I thought I should have you whining and crying and begging like a booby, when it came to the pinch."

"You will not find me doing anything of that kind, you can bet."

"I hope not, for it will make my work all the more difficult to perform. I shall think the more of you for it."

"Before you let that canine loose," Dick rejoined, "I have a favor to ask."

"What is it?"

"That you will fix me in such a position that it can not bite my hands or face. I don't want to carry a scar, you know; at any rate, not where it will show."

"H'm! that's so. How can I do it?"

"You might stand me on my feet."

"But, then, how could the dog bite you?"

"Why, it could take a piece out of one of my legs, couldn't it?"

"Ha! yes; that's so. I could bare one of your legs, and it would soon snap at it."

Dick had not ventured to suggest this item, but could not very well oppose, since the scheme he had in mind seemed to be going to work all right.

It was his intention to grapple with the doctor, if he could get him within reach, and force him to release him if possible; or at least to get hold of a weapon with which to kill the dog.

The arrangement of the strait-jacket, when relaxed, gave him some freedom of arms and legs. Unless it was further loosened at the back he knew he could not stand up, and hoped to lead the doctor to make it sufficiently slack for that.

"I'd rather have the scar on my leg than anywhere else," Dick declared.

"All right; I'll fix it so. You see I am making it as easy for you as I can, for such a little dog as this cannot hurt you greatly, while at the same time a little bite will answer the purpose as well as a greater one."

"I see. Well, just help me to my feet, and then you can proceed."

But the doctor would not lose sight first of the important item that there must be some spot for the dog to bite.

"Wait till I bare your feet and legs," he said, "and then I'll stand you up."

"No need to take off my shoes," Dick informed; "just draw up the legs of my trowsers. I have no boots on."

"All right; that will do just as well."

This the doctor did, and taking hold under Dick's arm, helped him to rise.

It was then he found that his prisoner could not stand upright, and took hold of the back strap to loosen it.

No sooner did Dick feel the infernal harness relax, than he turned like a flash and caught hold of the demon doctor to bear him to the ground.

He met with a surprise.

The doctor was about the strongest man he had ever laid hold upon.

Taken off his guard at first, he had given way under Dick's attack, but he immediately recovered.

Stiffening his muscles, he stood like a rock, almost, and, hampered as Dick was, he saw that the chances were against him in the struggle.

"Curse you!" the doctor hissed, "what would you do?"

"I mean to escape from you if I can," was Dick's response. "Do you think I would submit tamely to your diabolical designs?"

"Ha! I thought it would come to this. I thought your courage would leave you at the last moment—I *knew* it would. But I'll show you who is master."

Then began the terrible and desperate struggle.

The doctor was the larger and heavier of the two, and that counted in his favor, while his strength was wonderful.

Dick had not full use of his limbs, and it seemed to be the doctor's main purpose to get hold again of the strap at his back, when he could quickly govern him.

Dick fought against this with all his power, but saw that it was useless and that he must lose.

There was only one other chance, and that was, to kill the dog.

He had calculated that if he could force a fall upon the cage, the combined weight of himself and the doctor would crush the dog instantly.

Exerting all his strength, or all of it that he could exert, hampered as he was, he forced the doctor in that direction, and, fortune favoring him, tripped him at the right moment.

Down they went, all in a heap, the cage squarely under them.

There was a single yelp, and all was over so far as danger from that particular canine was concerned.

At the same time the doctor succeeded in getting hold of the strap, and with a jerk he bent Dick backward until it seemed to Dick that he was being pulled apart.

"Curse you!" the doctor hissed, see what you have done! You are a crazy man, and lucky for me that I had this thing on you. I'll show you yet, though, for I have no intention of allowing you to escape. Curse you, curse you! You have only made your stay here all the longer, and now I'll show you no mercy at all."

"I don't expect any," retorted Dick. "You are mad, and I am in your power; but once let me get free, and I'll give you a lesson."

"Mad, am I? Not so! It is *you* who are mad. The terror of it all has upset your reason. I knew well that I could never hope to get any man to submit to it tamely, so I was prepared for the worst."

"Well, what are you going to do now?" Dick demanded.

"What am I going to do now? You shall learn that before many hours pass. I shall bring a huge mastiff here, and shall not be at all particular how and where he bites you, either. Then I shall proceed with my experiments as though nothing had happened."

"You are likely to find me dead when you come back."

"How so? You cannot kill yourself, crazy as you are and as no doubt you would try to do."

"It won't be necessary; if you leave me in this position I'll die anyhow. An inch further would break my back."

There was something in this, for Dick's position was one of torture; but he was willing to accept a chance for another struggle with the madman.

After what he had learned from Zephyr Zeke and Job Patience, it would never do for him to be confined in that cavern, perhaps to spend the night there. His presence was needed elsewhere.

"It would serve you right if I did leave you just in that position," the doctor declared. "I want to keep you alive, however, so I will let up a little."

Stepping forward, he took hold of the strap and slackened it.

As soon as Dick felt it relax he made a supreme effort, but it was of no use, for the doctor was cautious.

Letting it out a few holes, so that Dick's position was slightly more comfortable, he made it secure at that, and sprung back out of reach, though Dick's position left him still helpless to do anything.

"There," he observed, "that will do, I think. You will be safe enough until I return, and then I assure you I shall accomplish my object. Adieu."

And with that the madman turned away, and Dick was left alone.

CHAPTER XIII.

UNEXPECTED EVENTS.

DEADWOOD DICK'S thoughts were anything but pleasant.

What the outcome of the matter would be he hardly dared to contemplate.

If the doctor's dogs were really mad, and he should bring a huge mastiff, as he had threatened to do, Dick saw that his chance for life was small, indeed.

What could he do?

That was the question that puzzled him sorely. There he lay, helpless, with head, hands and feet all drawn backward to a painful degree.

Help himself he positively could not, and to look for any one to come to his rescue was a hope so faint that it was no hope at all.

True, if the doctor returned to his dwelling without him, then he knew Kate would demand to know where he was, and might get Zephyr Zeke, and come to his aid in time to save him.

But the thought that his dear wife should risk her life in the horrors of such a place, almost led Dick to hope the doctor would not return to his shanty at all. And in fact he did not believe he would, either, for he was cunning.

To return without Dick would lead to inquiry, and inquiry might balk the plan upon which his whole soul was intensely bent. It was not likely that he would show himself until his object had been accomplished. And even then, should Dick die while mad—

Dick stopped suddenly in his meditations and listened.

Some sound had come to his quick ears, and he wanted to learn what it was.

In a moment it was repeated, and then it grew continuous and Dick recognized the tread of a horse's hoofs.

"Where in creation can a horse be coming from, in this dismal hole?" Dick asked himself. "I must be mistaken—but, there is no mistaking that sound."

He listened attentively, the sound coming nearer each moment and growing more and more distinct. There was no mistaking it, as he had declared. But, the mystery of it—

It was useless for him to speculate upon what it was impossible to understand, so he gave it up and waited.

Nearer and nearer, till it seemed that the animal must be right at hand, and then suddenly a voice called the horse to a halt.

"Whoa!" Dick heard. "Where the deuce are we, Kitty?"

The horse gave a whinny, and Dick knew that horse and rider could not be many yards away.

"Hello!" Dick called out.

For a moment his voice echoed and re-echoed in the hollow chamber, and there was no other sound.

After a pause, however, came the answer:

"Hello!"

"Who are you?" Dick asked.

"I'm a traveler trying to reach a place called Dixon's Deposit," was the response. "Where the merry deuce are you?"

Like a flash a solution to the mystery flashed across Dick's mind.

Here was another traveler who, like himself, had got lost in Perdition Pass! It must be so. And this cavern must be divided from the Pass by only a very thin wall of rock.

"I'm in a cavern," Dick made reply.

"I see no cavern."

"There is one near you all the same, and I'm in it."

"Well, come out and show yourself, then. I'm no robber, but an honest man; and I hope you are the same."

"My word is the best I have to offer for that," Dick returned. "If you will take that, all right. As to my coming out, I can't do it for two reasons. The first is, I am bound hands and feet; the second, I don't know of any way out in that direction."

"A prisoner! How came you there?"

"Before I make too much of a confidant of you, tell me who you are," Dick requested.

"Well, I don't mind telling you that. My name is Walter Hargreave, and I am from New York. Now, who are you?"

"Walter Hargreave!" cried Dick.

"Yes; what is there about that to astonish you?"

"Why, you are the very man of all others I would most wish to see just now."

Could Dick have seen the person with whom he was talking, he would have seen a face that was the picture of astonishment.

His guess concerning Perdition Pass was correct, and here was a young man at the end of the pass, looking vainly for some outlet that would permit him to proceed further.

He was a young man, perhaps twenty-six years of age, and good-looking, with a bold, frank face. He was clad in rough attire; that is to say, a rough business suit, that had evidently seen hard service. He wore boots, and a Western broadbrim was on his head.

"What do you know of me?" he demanded. "Why am I the man of all others you most want to see? Come, explain, for you have more than awakened my interest."

"It is easily explained," answered Dick. "I am the man sent here by Boardman Witmore to look for his brother, the doctor."

"Ha! Is it possible? And have you found the doctor?"

"Yes; and he has found me, too. Mr. Hargreave, my life depends upon your getting me out of here with as little delay as possible."

"Only tell me how to do it, and I'll risk my life to accomplish it, if need be. Tell me, though, what of the ladies? Are they safe and well? You must know how anxious I am."

"I understand. They were alive and well less than two hours ago, and I suppose are the same yet. Help me out of this, and I'll take you to them without loss of time."

"Only suggest some plan. I hear your voice, but I do not see anything that looks like an entrance to a cavern."

"Is it dark out there?"

"No; but not very light."

"It is dark as Erebus here, which proves there is no opening, so there must be a thin partition of wall between us. Dismount and sound the wail in the direction of my voice."

"All right."

Dick heard him spring to the ground, and in a moment more heard him pounding on the wall with some heavy object.

It was a heavy stone which the young man had picked up for the purpose, and with it he struck the wall heavily in several places.

The blows gave forth a hollow sound, proving that Dick's theory had been the correct one. But then there had been little chance to err regarding it.

Suddenly something happened.

The stone struck a place that was particularly thin, and went through, while in the same moment almost half a ton of shattered wall fell down, leaving an opening as wide and high as a railroad tunnel. The wonder was that the wall had stood so long, for it was rotten and weak.

In the dim light that thus entered, Dick saw the man whose timely arrival had probably saved his life.

Hargreave looked in, cautiously, and seeing Dick, advanced to where he lay and stooped down beside him to learn how he was bound.

"This infernal thing that holds me is a strait-jacket," Dick explained. "A strap at the back governs it. See if you can find that, and unbuckle it as soon as you can."

Half a minute or so served to discover the working of the thing, and much to his relief Dick was permitted to get upon his feet.

"I have been in tight fixes before," the Prince observed, "but I was never more pleased to get out of one than I am to get out of this. Give me your hand."

They clasped hands, and when Dick had cast the thing off entirely he made a brief explanation of the situation.

"Well, what do you purpose doing?" Walter Hargreave asked.

"That is to be considered now," answered Dick. "I am of the opinion that Doctor Witmore should be made a prisoner as soon as possible, before he does harm to himself or somebody else."

"I agree with you in that."

"Well, we are two against him, and to judge by your build you are no weakling, and neither am I. The doctor is a powerful man, though, and it may tax us pretty well to take him without harming him."

"I am ready to help you, if you want to undertake it."

"We had better do it, I think. There is another thing to look out for, and that is the dog he is going to bring with him. He declared he would bring a big mastiff, mad; but of course he will bring it bound, so we may have no trouble so far as that is concerned."

"I think you are right. We had better undertake it here and now than to put it off longer."

"Have you any matches?"

"Yes."

"Give me two or three, and I will make a search for my weapons. I think it very likely they are near the foot of the ladder where I fell."

Lighting a match, Dick went around in the direction where he knew the ladder to be, and there just behind it lay his weapons where the doctor had tossed them on disarming him.

Securing them, Dick advised his friend to secure his horse, and when that had been done they sat down near the ladder to talk, and wait. They were there nearly an hour before they heard anything from the doctor.

Finally they heard him coming, and with him a growling and snarling dog of no mean size, to judge by the sound.

Behind the ladder, as they had found, was a shelving recess, into which they were able to crouch nearly out of sight from midway of the ladder, and where from the top they were not to be seen at all.

Into this they crept, and waited.

The doctor paused at the top, and was busy there for some moments.

Presently some dark object came swinging and swaying down, as they could see by the light of the lantern.

It was the dog, securely bound and muzzled, which the doctor was letting down with a rope. It was soon at the bottom, and the rope was tossed down on it.

Then the madman's feet were heard on the rounds of the ladder, and Dick and his comrade stepped cautiously out to lay hands upon him the moment he came within reach, taking him unawares.

And that they did. As soon as he was well within reach of their hands they laid hold upon him, and before he could realize what it meant, or offer any adequate resistance, Dick had snapped a pair of handcuffs upon his wrists and he was their prisoner!

Still it took all their combined strength to hold him, for he struggled and raved like the madman he was, and together they had to throw their weight upon him and bear him to the ground. Having done that, Dick suggested the strait-jacket for him, and it was put on as quickly as possible under the circumstances, and when it was drawn tight his struggling ceased.

"Curse you, curse you!" he cried loudly. "You have robbed me of fame, and the world of the blessing I was about to bestow upon it! You idiots! Release me, and let me go on with my work, the importance of which you cannot understand."

And so he raved, to a length impossible to quote.

While Dick and Walter were debating what to do with him, a sound at the top of the ladder drew their attention, and both looked quickly up.

There, to his amazement, Dick beheld his wife, Kate!

"Kate!" he cried. "You nere?"

"Dick! Dear Dick! Is it indeed you? Oh, I am so glad to find you all right!"

With eager haste she swung herself over and descended, when she threw herself into Dick's arms.

Dick explained the situation to the stranger, introducing Kate, and then looked to Kate for her explanation of how she had come there.

"Why," she said, "I grew so uneasy about you, Dick, that I could not rest idle another moment. Something told me you were in danger. In spite of all protests, I followed where I had seen you go with the doctor. When I entered the shanty within the dog-pen I heard the doctor just going down the ladder, and looking down, saw what he had. I followed, and—Well, if it had been necessary, there would have been a dead doctor, that's all, for I would have shot him at the very first move he made against you."

"Brave, bonny Kate!" Dick cried, again catching her to his breast. "I am glad I was rescued before you came, for it would have been terrible otherwise, though your course would have been the only one open to you."

A conference was held and action decided upon. The dog was killed, the doctor was left there bound, and the trio ascended the ladder and started for the camp.

CHAPTER XIV.

COMING TO THE PINCH.

WHEN they finally got out of the dismal den, it was, to Dick's surprise, getting dark.

He had been absent longer than he could believe he had, and it was no wonder that brave Kate had set out to find him.

They found the two girls at the shanty filled with dread and alarm at the long absence of them all, and it was with great joy they were welcomed back.

Walter Hargreave was the last to enter, and

at sight of him Tella gave a cry and was almost overcome for the moment, and he sprang forward and caught her in his arms.

"Where is uncle?" asked Nola.

"I found it necessary to make a prisoner of him," answered Dick.

"A prisoner?" cried Tella. "Why did you not bring him with you here? You do not mean to leave him out there, do you?"

"For the present, yes," answered Dick. "He is mad beyond hope, and it will not do to release him. But we shall all go to him presently, for we are going away from here to-night."

"To-night?"

"Yes; for I have learned that it will not be safe for you to remain here any longer. Your fears were only too well grounded."

Some explanations were made all around, while the girls prepared something to eat, and when the repast was over Dick made known his intentions of going out to find Zephyr Zeke.

Kodak Kate insisted upon accompanying him, and while at first Dick objected he finally gave consent, and they set out together from the shanty and made their way in the direction of the saloon, though they well knew the danger.

"Do you not think we might find the old man at Job's shanty?" Kate remarked, when they had gone perhaps half way.

"Perhaps you are right," answered Dick. "At any rate it will do no harm to go there first, for Mrs. Patience must get ready and take her children to the doctor's shanty as soon as she can."

So, they changed their course and started for the shanty of Job Patience.

Not far had they proceeded, however, when Dick heard a step behind them, and turned quickly, weapon in hand.

It was Zephyr Zeke.

"I hev been wantin' ter find you two," he said, as he came up. "Thar is ther deuce ter pay now."

"What is up?" asked Dick.

"Waal, ther fu'st thing, Knock-'em-stiff is lookin' for you wi' blood in his eye, and swears that yer has got ter fight him ter ther death when he sees ye. Then the other p'izen cusses, Sleek John and Gentleman Jo, ar' at ther saloon playin' a game ter see which of ther doctor's gals each is ter have. Seems they can't settle ther question no other way."

"The scoundrels!"

"Yer well says et. Now, what I was goin' ter p'pose, that we had better all pick up and git out of hyer as quick as we kin."

"I agree with you in that, but it will take a little time to get ready. Do you know of any other man who is to be fully trusted besides your friend Patience?"

"No, darn me ef I do. Thar's old Yankee Doodle, he's honest enough, but he is a crank on ther question of whether this hyar camp ar' in ther United States or Canady, an' ef Johnny Bull was ter say one word to him, he'd drop everything else and go ter fightin'."

"Then he isn't to be trusted, you think?"

"I wouldn't trust a life to him, for the reason aforesaid."

"Then it rests between you and Job. One of you must take the horses out of the camp and around into Perdition Pass."

"What ther merry is that fer?"

Dick explained the situation fully.

"Oh, I see. Waal, I reckon I'll send Job on that biz, fer ef thar is a tug o' war hyer, I don't want ter be counted out of et. I want ter be right in ther van ter do my part, fer ther odds will be tremenjous."

"A fig for the odds," cried Dick; "we'll discount them all. We must go and tell Job and his wife to get ready, and you can see that Job gets off all right with the horses. He must take mine and my pard's, and as many more as he can get hold of."

"All right, I'll see to et; and this hyar is a good time fer 'em ter be got off, fer every galoot in ther camp is at ther saloon, mostly, seein' ther game, and all ready fer ther wedding which ar' ter foller. Haw! haw! I ruther think et will be a wedding o' lead fer some of 'em, ef they git in ther way o' our guns."

"I rather think so, my friend."

They were soon at Job's shanty, where they found Mrs. Patience in tears, and Job with a face as long as a fiddle.

Job had learned what was going on at the saloon, and was trembling for the safety of his own household, and was all the more anxious since he had seen nothing of the ranger or Dick.

"Hyar, this won't do," the old man exclaimed. "Dry up them 'ar tears, woman, and git ready yer young-'uns, and what chattles ye kin carry,

and vamose fer Doctor Witmore's shanty, where ye ar' ter wait, ready fer ther order ter move. And you, Job, I've got work fer you ter do, so come along."

Out the ranger went, taking Job with him, and leaving Dick to finish the business there.

"What does he mean, anyhow?" Mrs. Patience wonderingly asked.

"Just what he said, madam," answered Dick. "Get ready to leave the camp as soon as you can, and go with your children to the doctor's shanty, where the ladies will welcome you. You will have to leave most of your things, except what you can easily carry, but do not worry about that, for I have promised your husband help when he gets to a safe place with you."

"Oh, how can we ever thank you, sir?"

"Don't mention it, but make haste to do as directed, and be careful not to let your movements become known."

"All right, sir."

"And, Kate, perhaps you had better help her," said Dick.

Mrs. Patience stared at Dick's "pard" in amazement undisguised.

Dick had to smile, but let the woman promptly into the secret, much to her surprise.

"What are you going to do, though, Dick?" Kate asked, with some misgiving.

"I am going to see about the horses," Dick answered. "Everything depends on getting them, and I want to be sure of them."

"You will not risk danger by venturing into that saloon?"

"No; I promise you that. I would like to go in, and were I the only one in danger I would, too; but under the circumstances I must be prudent. I would like to take all the fight out of that bullwhacker, and also to teach those rascally gamblers a lesson they would not forget in a hurry."

"No; you must not venture there now, Dick."

"You have my promise."

So Dick left the shanty and hastened in the direction of the stables.

Arriving there, he found the ranger ready to receive him with a cocked weapon, while Job was getting out the animals.

There were only five horses to be had, including Dick's two, and these were soon got ready, and when Job started off with them Dick and the ranger stood ready to cover his retreat, and so remained until he was out of hearing.

"Well, that is one move made," observed Dick.

"Yas; and now we had better git back to ther shanty and be off with ther wummin'."

"I agree with you. Give us ten minutes more, and Dixon's Deposit will have something to wonder over when its villainous denizens come to set about their infernal business."

They hurried forward, to finish the work in hand.

To reach the doctor's shanty they had to pass the saloon, but by taking the opposite side of the street hoped to pass it undiscovered.

Before they came to it, however, they heard a great shouting within, and the next moment the doors were burst open, and the crowd came pouring out into the street in haste.

The open doors shed light upon the scene, and Dick and Zeke were soon able to comprehend what was going on.

Knock-'em-stiff, the peacemaker, had broken up another fight between Johnny Bull and Yankee Doodle, and had walked them out of the saloon in haste.

But, that was not all, as the shouting within immediately disclosed.

"Rah fer ther weddin'!" they heard shouted.

"That's ther talk! Ther light fer Sleek John and ther dark one fer Gentleman Jo. 'Rah! 'Rah!'

"Come," cried Dick, "we haven't a moment to lose."

"Right you ar', pard," agreed the ranger, "Come on."

They sprang forward at a run, hoping to pass the crowd unseen, but the fates were against them.

Johnny Bull and Yankee Doodle were struggling against their common foe, and Knock-'em-stiff was jinking them around regardlessly, displaying his strength.

Of a sudden they took a run to the opposite side of the street, and there, before it was to be avoided, a collision took place with Dick and Zephyr Zeke, in which Knock-'em-stiff's hold was broken.

His prisoners went to the ground in a heap, where they resumed hostilities with vigor, while Knock-'em-stiff glared around to learn what had happened.

Seeing Dick, a roar escaped him that was like the bellow of a bull.

"Hyar you be, hey!" he cried. "I hev been lookin' fer you, I have, an' now we'll settle 'counts!"

Leaving Johnny Bull and Yankee Doodle to the full enjoyment of their Kilkenny cat performance, the bullwhacker turned upon Dick with full fury and tried to clinch with him.

The first he was aware of was a stinging blow on the forehead, that sent him reeling back until he sat ungracefully down in the dust.

"Consider the account settled," Dick called out to him. "I'm in a hurry and can't fool away time with you."

"Yer blamed coward, ye dassent stand!" the bullwhacker roared. "Ye knows I kin lick ye, an' if ye runs I'll foller ye up an' kill ye."

Dick turned hastily to Zeke and whispered:

"You must hasten to the shanty and get the women down into the cavern just as soon as possible. If I go on, the whole crowd will follow us, and so will defeat our object. Not a word. Go!"

There was no time for any argument about it, and seeing that Dick meant what he said, and recognizing in him a firm commander, the old ranger ran on to the help of the helpless.

"You think I'm a coward, do you?" Dick cried, turning at once to face the bullwhacker. "I'll try and convince you otherwise. Get up here, and let me take some of the conceit out of your big head, you blunderbuss!"

CHAPTER XV.

THE ESCAPE AND CONCLUSION.

MOST of the crowd had now run to that side of the street.

Doodle and Hobbs were pulled apart and kicked off the scene in different directions, and a ring was formed around Dick and Bullwhacker.

Ben Bone was now up, and was preparing to do something. He had cast off his coat and hat, and was rolling up his sleeves in a way that meant business, bellowing as he did so.

"I'll show yer," he roared. "I'm goin' ter make b'ar bait of ye this hyer time, as sure's ye ar' born. Come, peel off that ar' coat an' git ready ter go ter yer own funeral, me dandy."

"It is the proper thing to go to a funeral with one's coat on," Dick coolly retorted. "You can take off your hide, if you want to, and that will save me the trouble of taking it off for you. I'm going to do you up this time."

"Haw! haw! haw! Yer is only a baby aside o' me. Why, I'm goin' ter jest nat'rally wipe up ther read with ye, I am!"

"All right, walk right up and open the ball." "Hand the feller what licks 'as got ter treat ther crowd," called out Trystan Trinkle, the bum.

Knock-'em-stiff was soon ready, and stepped up like a gladiator, with the new print of Dick's knuckles standing out on his forehead like embryo horns.

Dick promptly stepped up to meet him, and without any idea of making any foolishness of the job. He would, if able, knock the gentleman out in just as short a time as possible.

Bullwhacker squared off, and struck out.

Dick swept his arm aside with ease, and returned the blow with interest.

His fist took the fellow under the jaw and sent him over on his back as though he were a ten-pin.

Dick took a hasty survey of the crowd, and saw that near him were some of the most evil-looking faces the camp could boast.

He believed they meant no good to him, and that hard, fierce look came over his face.

He was one against the crowd, almost, but he did not falter.

The bullwhacker was getting up again, roaring like a lion.

"I'm goin' ter kill ye!" he bellowed.

"I'll take the risk of that," retorted Dick.

"I'm goin' ter cut out yer heart!"

"All right, step right up and begin! Here I am, ready to meet you, and to discount all the help you want to bring. Come right along. You will find that Deadwood Dick is a hard man to buck against."

"Deadwood Dick!"

So cried more than one voice in the crowd.

"Yes, Deadwood Dick," the Prince of the West affirmed. "I presume some of you have heard of me."

It was plain that some of them had, and more than one hand sought a weapon, as though there was now more need for one than before.

Up got the giant peacemaker, howling mad, and uttering threats most terrible, and forward he sprung as before.

This time he got the dose that settled him.

Dick charged to meet him, and sent his right fist crashing against his face with frightful force.

It was a blow that lifted the man right off his feet, and laid him out on his back as though dead, and the fight was over.

But not so the trouble.

There was an angry growl from the bullwhacker's friends, and some of them pushed forward, with hands on weapons.

"Yer has killed ther best man in this byer hull camp," cried one, "and yer has got ter pay fer et. Put up yer hands, mighty quick."

"Up they go," cried Dick, flashing forth his brace of revolvers. "Open the way there, too, or down goes the first man that stands in the way. I mean business and death."

There was a slinking back on the part of the ruffians, and Dick sprung through the opening thus made in the ring.

Once through, he wheeled and faced them all.

"Don't one of you attempt to draw a weapon," he cried. "If you do it will be the last move you will ever make in this world, for you'll begin operations in the next world before you can think to wink."

The crowd was for the moment cowed and silent, as Dick backed away step by step.

"Stand right where you are," Dick continued, "for I have got the drop on you, with five bullets to the drop, and a dropper in each hand. Don't move, not one of you, or I'll plunk a hole in you that will make the blood fly, you bet. Hold your breath now for just a second—"

They realized that he was backing away from them, and a murmur began to be heard among them, when Dick suddenly turned and ran.

He had backed away to the corner of a shanty, and turning suddenly, dodged behind it and ran off in the darkness, breaking away from them all and flying for life.

Immediately a howl was heard, and almost the entire mob started in pursuit, but as they could not see it was a useless chase.

Dick made a wide circuit, and aimed at last for Doctor Witmore's shanty.

Going around to the rear, he dashed in.

Kate was not there!

His first glance had been for her, and he noted her absence. Tella and Nola were there packing up some trifles they wanted to take with them.

Walter Hargreave stood in the middle of the floor with weapons in hand, and Dick heard him urging haste as he sprang in.

"Where is my wife?" Dick demanded.

"Whv, she would go out to find you," answered Nola, "and—"

"Out to find me!" Dick cried. "What ever led her to take a risk like that? Come, don't think of taking anything with you but your lives, ladies; be thankful if you get away safely with them."

"Just what I have been trying to urge," declared Hargreave.

"Go at once!" Dick ordered; and he put out the light. "Go, and do not stop till you are safely in the cavern. Tell Zeke to wait there for me."

"Zeke ar' right hyer, lad," answered the old ranger's voice. "Come right along, and git down whar I've got ther wimmin and kids all safe. Come."

"Take them, Zeke," Dick ordered. "I have got to find my pard."

Throwing open the front door, Dick sprung out.

A howling mob was running toward the shanty from the direction of the saloon, some of them bearing lights.

Dick placed his fingers to his lips and gave a loud, shrill whistle-signal, and waited for a response, but none came.

Weapons in hand, he made a dash forward to meet the crowd, regardless of all odds, thinking only of saving his wife from falling into their hands.

But, he soon stopped, for between himself and the light of the saloon he caught sight of a slender figure running toward him at swift speed, with the howling mob in full pursuit.

Dick raised his weapons to fire, but did not shoot.

He knew that a volley would be the return, and a bullet might strike Kate.

He whistled again, and in a few seconds Kate came panting to his side, when he caught her up as though she were but a child and dashed to the shanty with her.

Stopping only long enough to bar the door, he caught her hand and hurried her on and out by the rear way, and off to the dog-pen, where they met Zephyr Zeke just coming to their assistance.

"It's all right, Zeke," cried Dick. "Let's get down and away as quickly as possible."

"Ther sooner ther better, lad."

It was darkness all around them, for they had not ventured to use a light, but they knew the ground.

Making their way to the shanty within the inclosure, they entered and Kate was hastened down the ladder to join those below, while Dick and Zeke held back a moment to learn what was going to be done.

The howling crowd had now reached the doctor's shanty, and cries of every sort were to be heard.

"Never mind ther cuss," cried one man. "Let him go. Ther wedding ar' ther thing on ther carpet now."

"Yas, let him go et: bring out ther purty gals an' let's see 'em spliced to their husbands, an' then fer a real old jubilee. 'Rah!'"

That was followed by a loud knock at the door of the shanty.

"I'd like to give them a few parting shots," Dick muttered vengefully, "but it would never do, considering the women we have got to protect."

"Et ar' too bad that we haven't force enough ter jest wade in an' wipe 'em out," the ranger regretted. "But, come, pardy, fer we hev no more business hyer, I am thinkin'."

"I guess you are right," responded Dick. "Come!"

So, with the sound of another and louder knock at the doctor's shanty ringing in their ears, they descended the ladder.

As soon as they were at the bottom they drew the ladder down and laid it on the floor, and having light here, Dick took the lead and started down toward the bottom of the dismal place.

The end was reached without mishap. There the doctor was found, as he had been left, and Hargreave's horse.

The madman was still raving, and insisted that he was not mad and that the experiment must be undertaken at once.

He was lifted on the back of Hargreave's horse, and secured, and the party pushed on.

Job Patience had not reached there yet with the other horses, and it was considered best to go on and meet him, as that would save time.

It was as well, and better, that they did so, for they did not meet him until they came to the canyon forks, where he was just about turning into Perdicion Pass from the other trail.

As speedily as possible the women and children were mounted, and soon all being in readiness, the party set out for the distant camp where they could find friends and shelter, and where protection would be assured.

It was long after midnight when they rode into the town.

Application at the hotel secured them food and shelter, and the horses were put away.

There was a doctor at this place, and he was called in to see Dr. Witmore, Dick giving him an understanding of the case.

The physician administered a powder that caused a heavy sleep to follow, and there was no more trouble with Dr. Witmore for many hours, not in fact even when he awoke.

When the stage set out from that place that day, the Witmore party were aboard, and Dick, Kate and Walter Hargreave accompanied it on horseback. It was a two days' journey to the railroad, but they reached the station without mishap.

It was there that Dick and Kate bade them adieu, Walter Hargreave taking charge, thus saving Dick the long trip to New York, which he had no desire to make just at that time. So, with many good wishes and fond farewells, they parted company, and the train bore the Witmore party East.

Job Patience and his family had not accompanied them thus far, but had stopped at the town where the stage spent the second night, and where Dick had given Job a sum of money sufficient to establish his household even better than it had been at Dixon's Deposit. And the old ranger, he had left the party at the place of their first stop.

In time Dick heard from Walter Hargreave, as well as from Boardman Witmore, who inclosed a handsome check. They informed him that Doctor Witmore was in an asylum, but was recovering gradually from his madness. Cards accompanying the letters also informed him that a marriage at an early date was to take place, Walter and Tella being the "chosen of the gods."

THE END.

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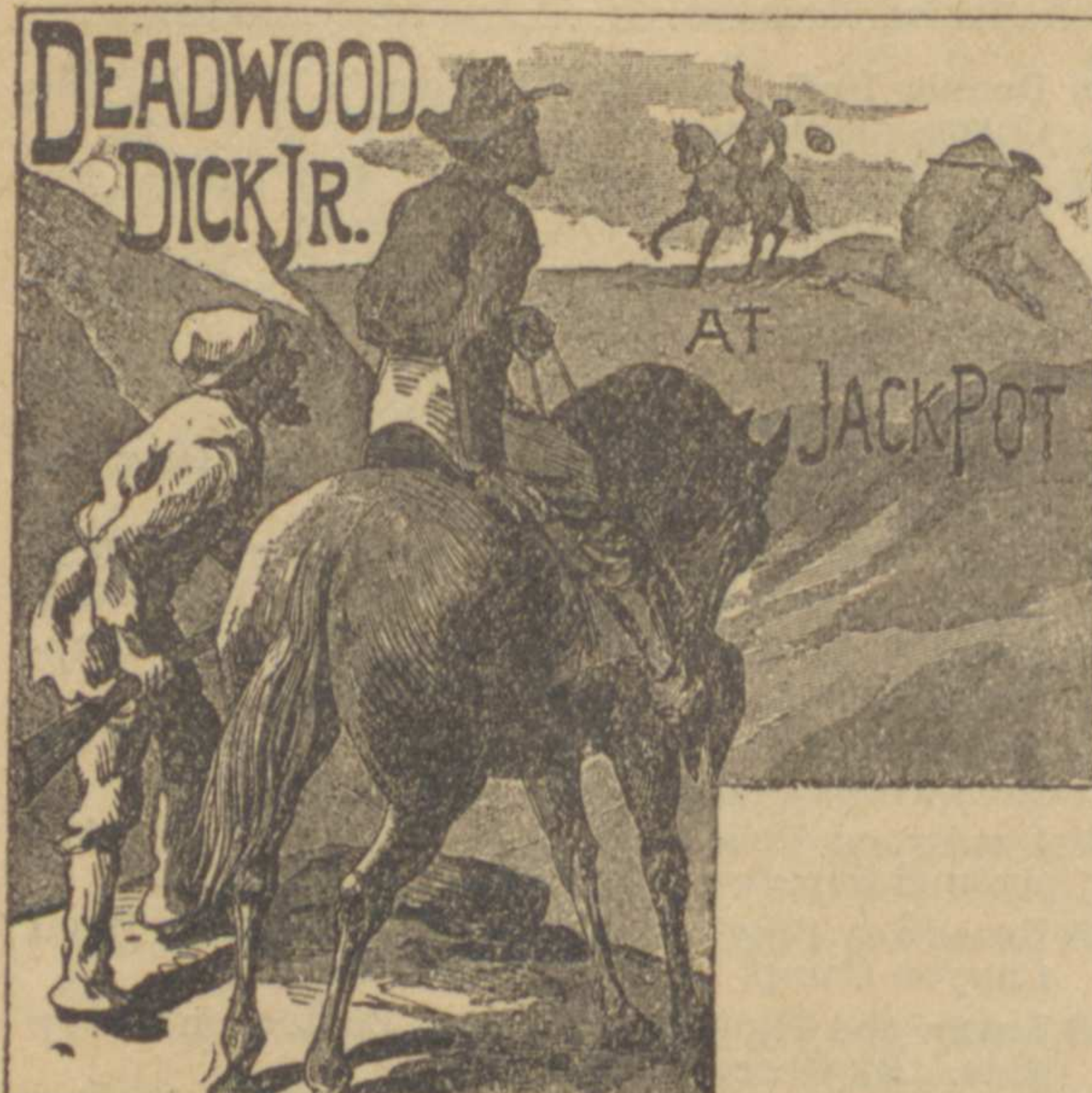
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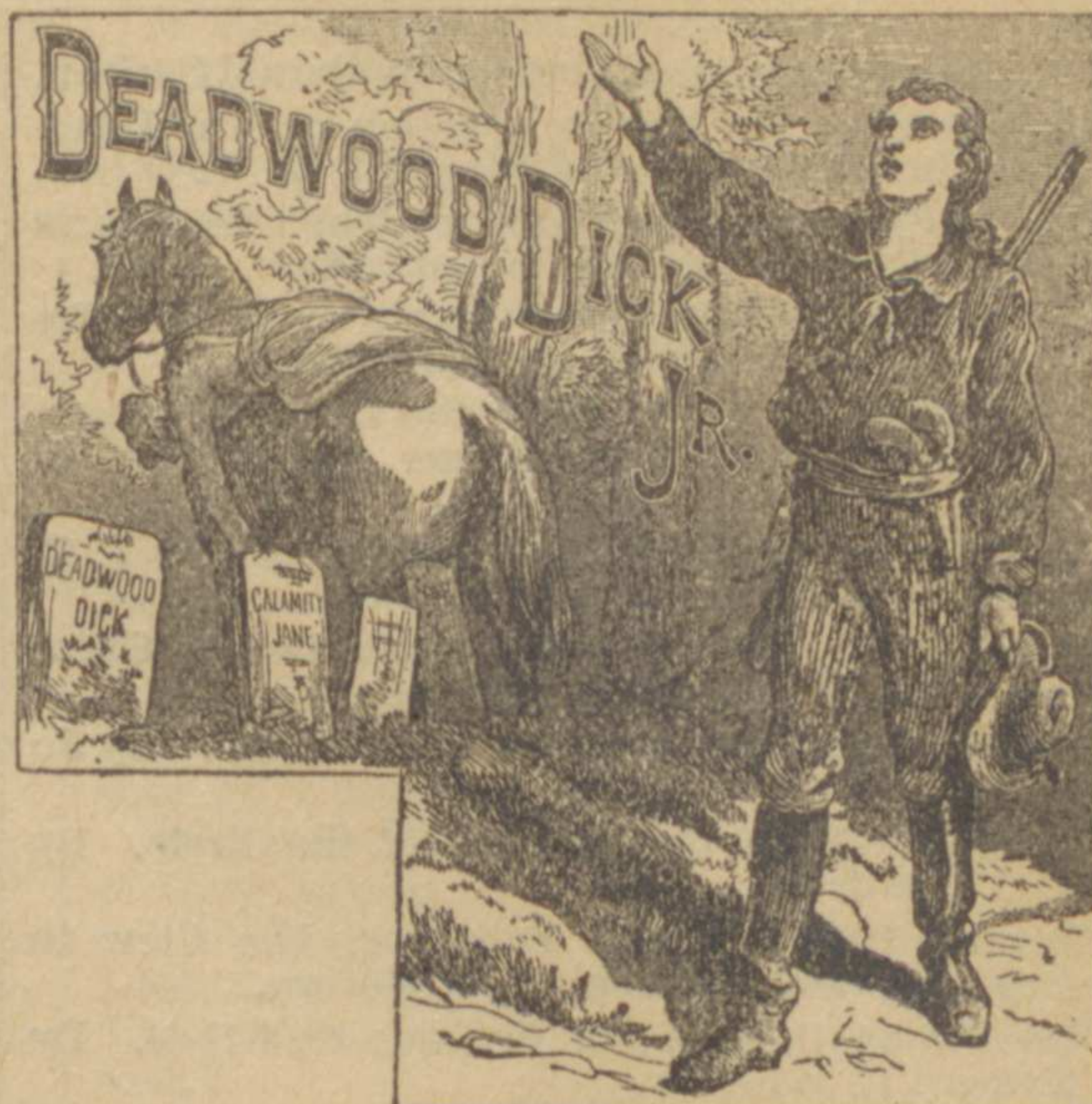
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